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der

Bisch. Melth. Kirche

Wefin, III.

Denn Weisheit ist besser, denn Perlen.—

Spr. 8, 11.

Gib dein Herz zur Zucht, und deine Ohren
zur vernünftigen Rede.—Spr. 23, 12.

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The Home-Story Series.

HOLIDAY STORIES.

By AUGUSTA LARNED.

THREE ILLUSTRATIONS.

9/10 70



NEW YORK:
PHILLIPS & HUNT.
CINCINNATI:
CRANSTON & STOWE.
1886.

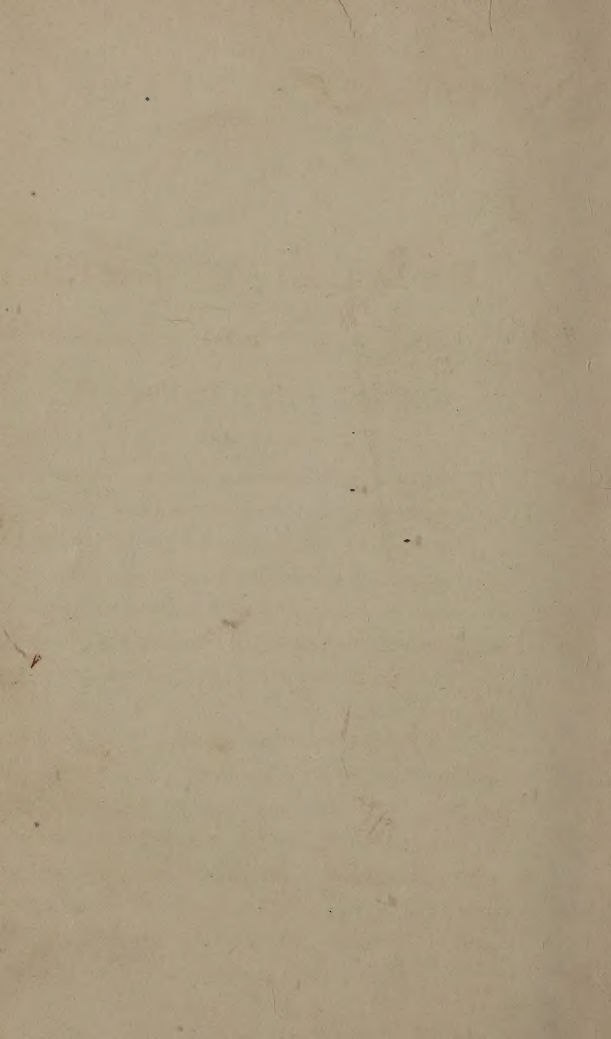
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HOLIDAY STORIES.

THE OLD FOLKS' CHRISTMAS.

THE soft, still snow-storm of Christmas Eve came and encamped like a band of angels round the old couple's humble dwelling. It stooped and kissed their aged foot-prints on the worn pathway, and with white and spotless hand smoothed the scars of the time-stained roof, and the faded clapboard that shook loose in wintry weather.

Every thing was old there. The gnarled, half-dead apple-tree in front; the clump of ancient plum-trees by the garden-wall; the well-sweep, worn out in service, complaining with a weak, querulous voice; the gate upon its wheezy hinges—gently and quietly decaying in summer sunshine and winter wind.

But the Christmas storm, shaken down by an

invisible Hand, had come to touch the half-dead features of the scene with a sinless, holy innocence. It was the white evangel of the Christ-child written for the children's festival—the dear children every-where, both old and young.

I am going to tell you of a very aged pair of children.

It was morning—the late, lazy morning of Christmas day—and it took the sun half an hour to edge round so as to steal over the cushion of feathery snow on the window-sill into Dame Hildreth's bedroom. Her face, sleeping upon the pillow, though withered, was not quite so sunken and aged-looking as the old man's beside her. But the white locks that lay scattered over her temples matched in whiteness the scant hair that peeped from Grandpa Hildreth's night-cap. So serene and placid, and so sinless, were their faces in the childhood of their extreme old age it seemed as if some spirit whose work is preparation had tenderly smoothed away every trace of sorrow and regret, every sharp little line drawn by ingratitude, distrust, or worldly wisdom, in view of the loosing of the "silver cord," the breaking of the "golden bowl."

When the sun touched Dame Hildreth's eyelids that Christmas morning she seemed to wake out of an ecstasy of infant slumber, and her gaze wandered to the pure, still world outside as joyous and happy as a bird.

"Wake up, grandpa ; wake up ! It's Christmas morning."

Grandpa was very old, and his blood was so very sluggish it took him a long time to wake up. The process seemed to begin in his toes, and get telegraphed slowly along, from station to station, until at last it reached his brain. The dame had to administer three nudges and two pretty sharp shakes before he opened his eyes.

"A Merry Christmas !" screamed she in his deaf ear. "Don't you see the world has blowed out, like our old plum-trees in April ?"

"So it has," said grandpa, yawning ; "but it beats the old tinker to think how we're blocked in. The snow must be nigh on to three feet deep."

"That's the joke of it," chuckled grandma with the most infectious delight. "We'll be all the snugger and cosier ; for our shoveling days are over, aint they, grandpa ? Still, it can't

keep our thoughts from flying off to all the happy people who are waking up this morning, though I can't think any of them are quite so happy as we are."

The old man looked at her with his faded, dim eyes ; but there shone in them the light of a young, divine love.

"What a rare day this will be for the lads !" the dame went on in her gleeful childishness. "Here's a Merry Christmas to all rosy-cheeked little boys, with their mittens and sleds."

"And here," said grandpa, "is a Merry Christmas to all the dear, rosy-cheeked little girls, with their doll babies and sugar-candy."

"What a Sly-boots you are, grandpa, to think of the little girls." He looked very much indeed like a Sly-boots, pulling on to his lean leg a long blue yarn stocking. Grandma tripped away, in her kerchief and petticoat, to the window ; for when her old bones once got in motion they were spry bones, indeed.

"O look !" cried she, gazing up to where the sunny blue sky was braided with the smooth, purple plum-tree branches, lined and faced with fleeci-est down, "what a flock of snow-birds has come to take breakfast on the gum of our

old trees. Bless their little hearts, how merry they are ! And that puts it into my head, we must get something extra for breakfast, seeing it's Christmas morning. What would you relish, grandpa ? ”

“ Some of your Injun cakes. Nobody's Injun cakes taste like yours. Let me see ; what did we have yesterday morning ? ”

“ Injun cakes and potatoes ; and the morning before, potatoes and Injun cakes.”

“ Let's have plain Injun cakes this morning, by way of variety.”

“ What a waggish man you are, grandpa, to say that, when you know we are just clean out of potatoes ! ” The innocent, happy old lady laughed with gleeful delight at grandpa's fun, and hand in hand they began their Christmas day.

The old man, dressed in a long, gray double gown, with the scant silvery locks falling to his shoulders, his bowed back, feeble knees, eyes that saw not much, and withered hands, groping forward, gave an impression of great decrepitude ; but Dame Hildreth, on the contrary, in her funny little cap, with its big bow called a windmill, her quilted stuff petticoat, neat

kerchief, and apron, conveyed the idea of brisk, alert old age. She seemed like an ancient robin taking care of something very much larger, more helpless, and dependent than itself.

Out into the kitchen they stepped—a snug enough place in its way, with their two splint-bottomed armed-chairs, cushioned with patch-work cushions, standing on either side the fireplace; the great fat old Tabby-cat in her basket; the tall old-fashioned eight-day clock, cased with curled maple; the dresser against the wall; the light stand, with its worn “Ha’ Bible”; the funny twisted, spider-legged table; with drying herbs, and grandpa’s hat and stick upon their pegs. A pretty, homely picture when firelight flickered along the wall and brought out warm glints from tin and pewter.

The old man piled some chips within the hearth, while grandma produced their small remaining store of wood. “Three sticks,” said she, counting them, and bubbling over with fresh fun, as if cold and hunger were little accidents quite beneath her notice, “such a big pile! such a huge pile! But there’s enough to keep us warm to-day; so we will mind the

good Book, and take no thought for the morrow."

Grandpa went and raised the window-sash, standing with his thin locks fluttering in the wind, as if to invite the radiant, mild, blue weather to be his guest. His dim gaze wandered off to the magic picture of snow-white trees, not yet deflowered by sunshine, resting against the deep azure of the sky.

"The air tastes just like maple honey, and smells like fresh roses," said he to his dame, who had come to peep over his shoulder.

"This is the children's day," answered she softly, "and the Father is showing his dear lambs how their kingdom looks."

By this time a fire was crackling and snapping on the old couple's hearth. A small, slender fire it was, to be sure. Grandma mixed the cakes, and grandpa baked them. When they sat down to their meager fare the old man spread his withered hands, and fervently asked God to bless their daily bread—the plate of thin corn-dodgers and a cup of weak tea!

I don't know whether it was Christmas sunshine streaming in at the window, or old Tabby purring before the fire, or the kettle singing on

the hook ; something certainly put grandpa into very high spirits that morning. He praised grandma's cakes more than usual, and he always praised them a great deal.

"I wish," said the dame, half sighing, "Roger could taste them ; he always set such store by my cakes, and these Christmas times bring him back as he used to be—a little, merry, black-haired shaver, hanging his stocking against the chimney, and scampering out before the day to see what old Saint Nick had brought."

"Don't fret your head about Roger," said the old man, with more spirit than was usual to his calm placidity. "Roger has the best of every thing to eat, drink, and wear ; and he seldom frets his head about us."

"Fie, grandpa ! I hope you don't cherish the old grudge to-day, of all days in the year."

"No ! no !" said he, with more and more spirit ; "but I haven't quite forgot all the past."

"I have," said grandma, eagerly, the light of a sacred memory coming to her eyes. "I have forgotten every thing but that day long years ago, when you said, as the Lord had given us prosperity, but withheld the blessing

of little children, it was our plain duty to adopt and bring up some houseless, motherless creature, just to keep us from growing selfish ; for there was great danger, grandpa, of our getting too much wrapped up in each other. I remember that other day, when we went to the poor-house, how my heart flew to little Roger on account of his dear bright eyes, God bless them ! and how I took him in my arms and carried him on my bosom, that never had felt the weight of a baby of my own. I mind that, grandpa, and I mind what a good lad Roger was ; how I loved to hear him whistle and shout. Quick at his learnin', too ; he never fretted me many times, only one day, when he robbed some birds' nests."

"Aye, aye, grandma, he didn't forget how to rob birds' nests when he grew up. I would have trusted him with uncounted gold ; but once (now I've most forgotten how many years ago) he asked me into Lawyer Shrewd's office to sign a paper. I left it to him to read, and he read it false. I signed away the old farm unknowingly, and Roger robbed our birds' nest, yours and mine." The perspiration started on the old man's forehead. He took his bandanna and wiped it off.

"It wouldn't have mattered so much 'whose name the property was in," said the dame, her mind groping on in old recollections, "if Roger hadn't changed toward us, and lost his frank, open-hearted way; especially after he brought his fine lady-wife home. We would have loved her dearly; but she never took to us. Perhaps our ways seemed rough and uncouth. I've sometimes thought we were a greater trial to her, a much greater trial, than we ever knew."

"No doubt on't; no kind o' doubt on't," said the old man dreamily, now lapsing back into the contentment of his second childhood.

The dame's more active faculties still fumbled at the knot of those sad memories.

"Did they tell us to go away from the old place?" asked she, looking up, half puzzled.

"No, no; it couldn't have been so bad as that. They must have hinted, just hinted, it was best for us to go. And perhaps Roger was right; for we've spent many, many happy years under this humble roof. Roger must have seen things clearer than we did, after all."

"Did it rain that night we came away—a cold, drenching rain, that wet us to the skin?"

My mind is blurred when I try to think of that night. May be I remember the tear drops on my cheeks, for it was hard to leave the dear old home we had worked and paid for with our own hands. Every tree was like a pet child ; wasn't it, grandpa ?”

“Yes, yes,” said the old man, completely lapsed now into the great calm of his years ; “but it was all for the best. Now, grandma, wont you hand me my Bible, open at the Psalms ? I haint no sight to read by ; but I like to feel the Book in my hand while I say them over by heart, it's so like the grasp of an old friend.”

“There,” said the dame, shaking the crumbs out of the window for the robins' breakfast ; “I hear somebody scraping on our steps. I'll warrant ye our old friends have found us out.”

“Yes,” said grandpa ; “a body's old friends are very apt to find them out on Christmas day.”

The brisk old woman flew in high glee to open the door. “Massy sakes alive ! It's Job ! Come in, Job, and a Merry Christmas to you !”

Job was a tall youth, protruding a good deal from his clothes at the wrists and ankles. His

face slanted up, and slanted down to the climax of a large red nose.

"No, thankee," said Job to grandma's invitation. "Thein ith Crithmath, a feller can't hang round the houth all day ; so mebbe you'll let me shovel off your walk for ectherthith."

"You're as good as gold, Job, and always was. Now, grandpa, I guess the old friends'll be coming along pretty brisk." She hadn't any very clear notion of what old friends were alluded to, (for, alas ! too many of those summer birds had flown away with the aged couple's prosperity,) but the idea warmed and pleased her very much.

"Gee-up, Bright, gee-up!" It was Seth French's voice, guiding a noble pair of oxen, attached to a heavy load of the best hickory wood, in at the old people's gate. There was much clanking of log-chains, creaking of the old sled, and plowing up of the light snow, that hung in a silver fringe on the strong, patient creatures' dew-laps. Seth French's blue eyes twinkled like two stars, in contrast to his red face and redder beard, as he gave three sharp knocks on the door with the butt-end of his whip.

"There, what did I tell you, grandpa?" cried the dame, running to admit the new-comer. "Seth French, I do declare!"

Seth was laconic. "You see," he began, "them pesky cattle" (curling his long whip-lash lovingly over the backs of his oxen) "haint done enough lately to earn their salt; so I thought, just to give 'em a little airin', I'd draw ye down a snag o' wood. It was kind o' worthless stuff, layin' round in every body's way; so mebbe you an' the Squire will do me the favor to accept on't."

"Do you hear what Seth says?" screamed grandma into the old man's deaf ear. "Do you hear what the best-natured, kindest-hearted man in the world says?—just as if he knew we had only five sticks in the house."

Seth thought it was high time to give a "gee-up" to his oxen and slip round to the shed.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when there came a rushing of feet, a scampering, tumbling, and hallóing of young voices. Even grandpa's dull ear caught the sound. "There are more of 'em—more of the old friends," chuckled the dame as she helped him to totter to the door again and threw it wide open.

Truly a pleasant sight met their eyes. Some dozen of the largest lads from school—their faces all aglow with rough-and-tumble play—had come, bearing saws and axes, to saw, split, and pile the old people's wood. They were drawn up on a line before the house. "Now," said the leader, tossing his cap into the air, "three cheers for Squire Hildreth! three cheers for Dame Hildreth! three cheers for Christmas!" As the boys' fresh voices resounded in hurrahs, the old man took his hat and waved it, as blandly pleased as an infant. The old woman fluttered her apron in joyous excitement.

Under Seth's direction two of the lads now brought in a huge back-log and forestick, piled them upon the hearth, and in no time a grand Christmas fire went crackling in roars and flames and showers of sparks up the wide-mouthed chimney. The sight of the dancing flames made tears dance into grandma's old eyes.

"We never trusted our heavenly Father in vain," faltered she, "and we have trusted him all our lives. The God of the young raven and the little sparrow—of all helpless, weak things

—has fed us from his store, and hid us under the shadow of his wing.”

The aged couple clasped hands, and met each other's gaze with a silent, unutterable prayer. Perhaps it was the depth of their grateful emotions, perhaps the merry roaring of the fire up the chimney, that prevented them from hearing a little child's hand that tapped at the door. It tapped once, twice; then it lifted the latch, and admitted a small, rosy-cheeked country lass, dressed in a homespun blanket and woolen hood.

“Why, bless my old eyes,” cried Dame Hildreth, running to kiss her, “if here aint Sissy Andrews!”

“Mother sent you a Christmas,” said the little girl shyly, presenting a basket almost as large as herself.* “And,” continued Sissy, with the subject very much on her mind, “she says I may stay a little while—if you ask me.”

“Heart and sakes alive! there aint such a treat in the world to grandpa and me as a little girl! So take off your things, and come and warm by our big Christmas fire.”

Sissy slipped out of her blanket, like a shin-

* See Frontispiece.

ing wheat kernel out of its sheath, looking, in her plump, dimpled state, as if there was no possibility of ever feeling cold. Then she slipped in between grandpa's knees, and in five minutes was on his lap, combing out his long, silvery hair, and patting his head with her funny little pin-cushion hands, until, with Tabby lying at his feet in the great glow of the Christmas fire, he looked the perfect picture of contented old age.

Meanwhile grandma unpacked the basket. "Here's one of Miss Andrews's mince-pies, and you know what a master-hand she is at a mince-pie; and a loaf of white bread; and a chicken, all stuffed; and a pot of honey." Each of these announcements was attended with a little burst of delight. "Now, grandpa," said she, giving him a sly poke, "I guess we'll roast this chicken for dinner, instead of having that big fat turkey down stairs." Away she trudged after the Dutch oven, and, when the chicken began fizzing and spluttering before the fire, declared it smelled just as good as if they didn't luxuriate on chickens every day they lived.

The next knock that came to the door was

from a school-boy's hand—a freckled, tow-headed school-boy, with the lappets of his cap tied very snugly over his ears.

“Here, grandma,” cried he, bursting in with a great quantity of fresh air, “I’ve brought you a Christmas-green.”

“La, if it aint our little speaker,” exclaimed the dame, “who speaks such a beautiful poetry piece! And I was just now saying to grandpa, if I had a Christmas-green I should be quite made.”

The laurel bough was accordingly put up over the antique looking-glass, and the little speaker called upon to speak. So he stepped out bravely, pulled his forelock, and in a nasal drawl began those famous lines of Mr. Pope’s—

■

‘ Father of all, in every age, in every clime adored.’

“Aint he a dabster at a poetry piece, grandpa? What did you say was the name of it, Nathan?”

“The Universal Hymn,” said Nathan, proud of his knowledge.

“O, the Universals’ Hymn. I never quite agreed with them Universals; but that is a good hymn if they do claim it.”

When the school-boy had gone home, and Sissy had trudged away through the snow ; and the beautiful day had slidden into the more beautiful orange-tinted sunset ; and the fire glowed like a deep, intense cavern of redness ; and Grandpa Hildreth lay dozing in his chair, his features all at rest, looking as if gliding insensibly out to the deep-sea soundings of eternity ; and Dame Hildreth sat in the opposite chimney-nook, her knitting in her idle hands, perhaps dreaming back to the days of her far-off, love-lighted girlhood, there came a knock at the door—a deeper, more meaning knock than any that had sounded upon it that day.

“Who is it ?” said the dame, peering into the gathering dusk.

“Don’t you know me, mother ?”

“Roger, Roger, at last !” half sobbed, half laughed the happy old creature, throwing her arms around him, quite regardless of the woman who followed, and the little golden-haired child, bearing white lilies in her hand that had pressed the waxen cheek of a dead boy.

“Where is father ?” huskily whispered the strong, broad-shouldered man, bowed and broken in some strange way.

"Here, here," and she led him weeping to the old man's chair.

"Grandpa, here is Roger come home."

"Roger," murmured the old man, half asleep. "I dreamed he was a little lad again, standing by my knee to read his primer."

"No, no, father," cried Roger, kneeling down at those aged feet; "not an innocent child, but a sinning, sorrowing man. From the death-bed of my brave, beautiful boy I come to implore your forgiveness." His voice was choked with tears.

"Nay, nay," said the old man, soothingly. "I have known what it is to be tempted, to be weak, to sin. How could I hold resentment in my heart? I pardoned you—fully, freely pardoned you—long years ago."

His arm slipped about Roger's neck; the little child, with her snowy lilies, crept into his lap, and laid her golden head against the old man's breast; the repentant wife knelt on the other side, and clasped hands with both of those she had so deeply wronged; and over that group, composed of feeble age, strong manhood, and sinless infancy, was breathed the Christmas spirit, "Peace on earth, good-will toward men."

“LITTLE BOOTS’S ” THANKSGIVING.

THERE were not many well-defined ideas in Little Boots’s rather chaotic African mind ; but among the clearest and sharpest was a positive belief in Thanksgiving as an institution well worthy of strict observance.

I do not in the least doubt but that among the Ten he firmly believed there was a commandment running in this wise : Thou shalt observe Thanksgiving Day, to keep it duly. Thou shalt be helped five times to turkey, three times to cranberry tart ; potato, squash, and turnip without limit. Thou shalt do ample justice to Maum Hannah’s pumpkin-pie. Cramming forbidden on pain of colic.

Beyond “jining” in, at the top of his lungs, when “Jubilo” and a few other tunes adapted to his disposition were given out at the “shouts,” and in colored prayer-meetings, and getting ‘powerfully scared,” while Brother Sambo

Smith exhorted, I am afraid Little Boots's religious education had been sadly neglected. Still, sitting by her ironing-table at night, he had gleaned a few truths from the lips of Maum Hannah which, I am happy to say, sank in deeper than the wool. Sitting with his little black hands clasped round a ragged knee, and the whites of his eyes turned up to her dignified, expressive face, while she smoothed away at "Missy Gray's" ruffles, he loved to hear Maum Hannah tell of the days when she was a slave in Carolina ; how she made her escape, and hid in the swamp, and ran through the bush, and got protected by the Abolitionists, until at last she had reached "de Norf," where she had spent many happy years. He loved to hear her tell, in her own strong, fervent words, how at length, after long years of patient waiting and almost despairing, "de brack folks" had been set free by "Father Abraham," to whose somewhat distorted image she reverently pointed, where it hung against her whitewashed wall ; "and now, bress de Lord ! she could make Thanksgiving in her heart every day she lived."

In these evening sessions Maum Hannah often took occasion to dwell upon the fact that

"no 'spectable colored folks was streaked." As soon as they would come down to life, and cheat, and steal, (comprehended in the sum total of "streaked,") "they wasn't any better than no-account white trash."

Little Boots kept a somewhat figurative "stand" on the corner of one of our down-town streets. His stock in trade consisted of a box of shoe-blackening and a second-hand brush, purchased—together with the good-will of the firm—for a kite-line and a ten-cent stamp from a couple of white boys who were going out of the business into lozenges and spruce gum.

Little Boots did not have a very large run of custom, on account, as he firmly believed, of the unfounded prejudice against color; and, what was an unfortunate circumstance for him, his friends, the Abolitionists, mostly blacked their own boots. However, the lowness of his finances never seemed to injure his taste for "hookey," or even "mud-pies," which he frequently manufactured in company with a small Philistine from the Five Points. Although Maum Hannah never realized any special pecuniary aid from the "stand" on the corner, she found a certain gratification in being able

to speak of "her son, who was in business for himself."

In the evenings, when the weather began to grow frosty, and Little Boots liked to toast his shins by the fire, he and Maum Hannah had a great deal of chat concerning the probable amount "Missy Gray's" washing would come to by Thanksgiving Day ; for all that part of her revenue, his mother had declared, should be reserved to furnish forth the grand feast of the year. Their calculations were scored in charcoal on the whitewashed wall, and just five days before Thanksgiving, after the most careful and exact reckoning, the account stood thus : \$8 64 due Maum Hannah. Little Boots made out the bill ; for he had had "schoolin'," and was the superior of his mother insomuch as he could read and write. Maum Hannah felt even prouder of his book-learning than she did of his business qualifications.

That Saturday night before Thanksgiving Maum Hannah piled the snowy, sweet-smelling clothes on her basket, and, pinning a Bay-state shawl round her stately form, set out for "Missy Gray's."

"Missy Gray" lived at the top of a great hotel,

up many wearisome flights of stairs that made Maum Hannah's back ache sometimes ; but to-night she did not mind them a bit, her thoughts were so full of that little piece of paper she held in her hand, which was to ~~change~~ into crisp greenbacks, and further on to a perspective of smoking dishes, before which she mentally saw herself and Little Boots sitting down. Some one within was having a bad coughing-spell when Hannah knocked at the door, and a feeble voice faltered "Come in," before dying quite away with exhaustion.

The room was not very large, or comfortable, or inviting. Drawn up before the fire stood an invalid's couch, and near it a little stand, covered with medicine bottles and glasses of mixture. The invalid herself, a little lady in a blue wrapper and white lace cap, looked as if she was making a great effort to sit up when she ought to lie down. Her eyes were so large and bright; the hectic on her cheeks was so hard and painful-looking ; her small, hot, wasted hands moved about so uneasily, as if always seeking what they could not find—it was plain she might not stay here long. Maum Hannah put down the basket, and came forward where she was.

"Hope you're better this evenin', Missy Gray."

"No better, thank you, Hannah. The doctor says I can't winter here. He wants to send me off to Cuba."

"'Pears like that's good advice, Missy Gray ; I 'specs you'll soon be gwine."

"Not there, Hannah ; it's no use. If I had any hope of getting well, I might go for my husband's sake, it worries him so to see me sick. But I have none ; and times are so dull, we cannot afford to spend the sum such a trip would cost."

"Hush, hush, honey ; don't look on de dark side. Shouldn't wonder if we had ye roun' pcart as a robin yit." Maum Hannah tried to laugh, but it ended in something very like a sob.

"Missy Gray" was seized with a racking cough that bent her double. "I've been going," said she, when she found breath to speak again, "ever since little Willie was taken away. You used to carry him, Hannah, in your arms when he moaned and moaned with that dreadful fever all day along. Sometimes I wake up in the night and hear him moaning now." Her hot,

wasted hands moved more uneasily than ever, as if feeling for her dead baby. "I shall lie down in time for the grass and daisies to grow over me next summer. But I must not make you dismal with these things, Hannah. I ought to have asked Charles for the money to pay your bill. He looked so careworn and anxious to-night I could not make up my mind to speak to him about it. You shall have it next time, without fail." Perhaps the invalid noticed a deeper shadow settling over Hannah's dusky face, and she asked, "Are you in any immediate need of the money?"

"Not pertickerler; only we're close on to Thanksgivin'," was Hannah's hesitating reply.

"Sure enough, I did not think about that. You want the money to buy your turkey and mince-pie. I should not lie easy in my bed if I thought I was depriving you of your Thanksgiving dinner." The hectic rose higher in her cheek, and something like trouble darkened her eyes. "Let me see, what can I do for you? I have it now, Hannah." She slipped off an emerald ring, much too large for the thin finger where it belonged. "Here, take this ring, and sell it to some jeweler. Any honest man ought

to give you twenty dollars for it—it cost fifty."

"No! no! Missy Gray, put dat ring rite back. I couldn't no way make up my min' to take it; an', now I t'ink on't, I reckon I can call in anoder little bill."

"Are you perfectly sure you can get along for Thanksgiving?"

"Lor, yes, mam; don't boder yer head no more 'bout it."

"Because, if you could," continued Missy Gray, "I'll keep the ring. Charles gave it to me many years ago, when we were first acquainted; you know he might miss it." She half sighed. "I shall think of you on Thanksgiving, Hannah. It will be so pleasant to know of somebody beyond these walls, on that dear old day, who is happy and joyous. Now don't fail to come and tell me all about it. And, Hannah, I am going to ask you to bring me a piece of your turkey. I think it would taste so good! Every thing in this hotel has grown stale to me. I loathe even my daily bread."

Maum Hannah gave the desired promise, with a dim perception of tender forbearance and pitying love that takes the form of a pious

fraud, and stepped out into the hall before she wiped her wet eyes.

Little Boots was waiting, as usual, round the corner, under a gas-lamp, for his mother to appear, and indulging in such ebullitions of darkey juvenility as cracking his knuckles and hitting his shins together to the rattle of a lot of dried peas in his trowser's pockets—all for his own diversion, just because the world looked so absurdly warm, and bright, and jolly, and comfortable. It never occurred to him that night that any body could be very miserable, till he saw his mother come out of the dark side entrance, with her head a little lower and her step a little more hesitating than when she went in.

It may be very foolish to take any particular interest in obscure folks, who live out of sight, down little dirty streets, in back slums, cellars, and garrets ; but I must say I feel a twinge of pity when I think how the world whisked round to Little Boots's mental optics while he was listening to what Maum Hannah had to say. He felt completely snuffed out. The one pretty picture he had made in his mind of Maum Hannah with her wholesome floury arms rolling crust by the table, while he, Little Boots,

assisted to seed raisins, chop suet, and prepare snips for tarts, was smeared quite out, as a school-boy smears the sum off his slate with the sleeve of his jacket.

Maum Hannah poked him several times in the ribs going home, and told him "not to take on so bad." Little Boots's "taking on" consisted in walking quietly by her side, and going straight to bed the moment they reached their humble dwelling.

The next Monday morning Little Boots rose early, because it happened to be one of his days. His days might be classed under the special names of sloppy, splosy, and sloshy. He had nothing to do with right down rainy days, for then people tramped along in overshoes, without thinking of their lower extremities; nor with clear, clean, bright days, when the country merchants and strangers staying at down-town hotels seemed to forget that their boots needed so much as a "touching up;" but all the nice intermediate shades of weather between these two positive kinds, might be hoped to afford Little Boots a moderate harvest of customers.

Broadway was still dim with dawn-mist when he arrived at his "stand." The few scattering

passengers in the street looked very much abused by somebody or something that had forced them out of their warm beds at such a preposterous hour. The frost coming out of the ground tickled Little Boots's bare feet, so that first he skipped, and then he hopped, and then he ran back and forth, to keep warm; thinking all the time, however, of a certain line in one of his copy-books which said, "The early bird catches the worm," and keeping a sharp lookout for the "worm." His "worm" happened to be a little fussy man, who was nervously crossing Broadway with an umbrella and cane in one hand, a carpet-bag in the other, a shawl over his arm, two papers sticking out of his side-pocket, and a white pocket-handkerchief fluttering from his breast.

There came tearing along, just then, one of those wicked express-wagons that seem to regard it as their mission to cover well-dressed, decent foot-passengers with mud. So, splash, dash, spatter!—away went a shower of foul stuff over poor little Mr. Fussyman, putting a period even to the end of his red nose. Dear me! when he reached the curbstone, didn't he sputter, and stew, and stump, and spit, and

whip his besmeared legs with his pocket-handkerchief; until, espying Little Boots, he called out:

"Hullo, Ebony, can you polish me off?"

"Yes, sah. I'll make ye see yere face in dem boots."

"Go ahead, then;" and he stuck out a pair of pedal extremities at which our little darkey brushed away vigorously. He was fussier than ever when he attempted to stand still; and out came his watch, and down dropped a latch-key, a ferry-ticket, an old letter, and a tooth-pick. No sooner had he recovered these pieces of property than he saw, or fancied he saw, an acquaintance vanishing down a side street; so he tossed a ten-cent stamp to Little Boots, and fidgeted away after him, quite oblivious of the fact that something important had fallen out of his vest pocket. Little Boots at first thought it might be a quid of tobacco. He touched it with his big toe, and then he touched it again, and at last he stooped and picked it up. Whatever it was, it was wrapped in a bit of tissue-paper, and had the feel of paper all through. He began slowly to undo it, and the further he went the more the whites of his eyes peeled.

Ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred-dollar bill. Good heavens ! Little Boots had picked up a fortune.

You are not a little black "Boots," and perhaps you never were tempted ; but he was for many minutes, while his brain spun round, to hide away that roll of money under his little ragged jacket, and rush off after a large flowered silk dress, a hat with a long red feather in it, the biggest turkey, the biggest pair of chickens, the most astonishing lot of "fixin's" ever seen ; all of which he dreamed of laying at Maum Hannah's feet.

But that idea, "that it wouldn't do, nohow, for black folks to be streaked," had got too deep hold of Little Boots's character ; so that by the time he saw a friendly policeman coming round the corner he made up his mind to confide the whole matter to the man of law. This officer, being quite well-disposed to the black race in general, and to Little Boots in particular, took a lively interest in the affair. When a question arose as to how the fussy gentleman, who had perhaps fussed off a dozen miles before that time, was to be found, the policeman suggested "Personal in the *Herald*," which our young friend thought a very bright idea indeed. So,

together, they repaired to "headquarters," and, after much consulting, produced the following document :

"If the ('fidgety' crossed out, as considered too personal) gentleman who dropped something, on the morning of Nov. 21st, corner of Broadway and —— street, will call at the 'old stand,' he will hear news of the same.

(Signed,) "LITTLE BOOTS."

Twenty-four hours after this the fussy man was fussing round in his room at an up-town hotel. First he brushed his teeth a minute ; then he rubbed himself violently with the towel ; then he ran to the glass, and began spreading lather upon his face preparatory to shaving ; then he left off, without the least reason in the world, to stare out of the window. At last his eye fell on the morning paper, lying upon his table still unopened. Quick as a dart, he seized upon it, and began running over the contents—marriages and deaths ; stock list ; lost and found ; personals. "Here I am. Hurrah for an honest darkey ! Hurrah for Little Boots ! Knew I should find it ; never lost any thing yet." Ring-a-ting-ting. "Waiter, get me a carriage."

In five minutes' time he had ordered three different carriages—and for aught I know they were all in attendance—when he darted off like a rocket, and fell upon Little Boots in the most unexpected manner.

It was with the pride of an honorable, high-minded shoe-black that our young friend restored the fussy gentleman's property to himself, and I give the fussy gentleman credit for behaving extremely well on the occasion. In the presence of the friendly policeman, he made over the newest, cleanest, crispest ten-dollar greenback in his possession to Little Boots as a reward of integrity; and I am credibly informed that he afterwards came out strong for negro suffrage, although heretofore maintaining, with his usual zeal, that only white folks were entitled to certain luxuries called "rights."

You ought to have seen Little Boots after that—how he hugged himself, and laughed, and danced, and capered. And how he went home and spread the greenback on Maum Hannah's knee, and how they hugged each other until the tears ran down their cheeks.

Then you ought to have seen them when Maum Hannah put on her things, and went with

him to market, where they "hefted" and considered all the good things that enter into the composition of a Thanksgiving dinner, until they came to the conclusion that nobody had made quite so good bargains as they had that day.

Best of all to see was the dinner itself, to which the small white Philistine from the Five Points was bidden, after a special dispensation of soap and water. Turkey and cranberry tart being entirely new sensations to him, Maum Hannah remarked that he didn't look near as "peaked" when he got through as when he begun. It would have made your heart glad to see how "Missy Gray" enjoyed the big plateful of good things Maum Hannah took round to her before the feast was over, and how young and pretty and well she looked just because Charles was at home, and seemed a little kinder and a little more attentive than usual.

Little Boots was, of course, the hero of the day, and he played the part principally by keeping his ivories on constant exhibition. Nobody found any fault with the occasion; and I think they all were as happy as it often falls to the lot of mortals to be in this rather crooked world.

PARSON FIELDER'S CHRISTMAS VISIT.

PARSON FIELDER scraped his feet free from snow and stamped them well. I do not mention the fact because his boots had been twice tapped and were still shabby. It was Christmas eve, and he was standing in the little brown porch of his own house, with the candle-light shining out of the sitting-room window. The air was crisp and nettlesome with cold. Naturally enough Parson Fielder might have thought of an overcoat, as people are apt to think of warm garments at Christmas time. But he only drew his wife's old blanket-shawl a little closer about his stooped shoulders, and looked up at the grand dome of the Christmas sky, all glittering with live stars.

"The heavens declare the glory of God," thought Parson Fielder; and the fervent poetry of the old Psalmist, that has sung itself down the ages, whispered peace to his troubled heart,

and brought that remote consolation which says, "A hundred years will roll their round, and gone will be our transient heartaches and pangs, while God's realities remain forever."

The feeling did not come because it was Christmas eve, and because hundreds of homes were cheerier that night than on other nights in the year, and hundreds of dear little bosoms were fluttering with blissful hopes, like baby-thrushes that chirp and twitter on the nest.

Parson Fielder had never given his hearty support and encouragement to Christmas. He was one of those conscientious, precise souls who are not at all sure that the world celebrates the exact day and hour of our dear Lord's birth; and life seemed to the good man so solemn, so responsible, so awful, in fact, he could but half sympathize with the joy-festival over the Christ-child. The "Man of Sorrows" was nearer to his worn breast than the bringer of glad tidings, whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains. It is accordingly safe to say that he was not thinking of Christmas at all as he opened the door and stepped into the sitting-room—the warm, bright heart of the parsonage. When the kitchen fire was up, the sitting-room fire was

down ; and in the evening the sitting-room grew cheery and pleasant, while the kitchen cooled off and gathered frost upon the windows.

The sitting-room carpet—of the big-flowered, old-fashioned kind, totally devoid of comeliness --had been turned until its turning days were over. The numerous faults and peccadilloes it betrayed were hidden under strips of oil-cloth and patches of divers colors.

Against the papered wall hung a set of pine shelves containing the parson's meager library, a grave and solemn array, headed by Edwards on the Will and Scott's Commentaries, and dwindling to a few volumes of the classics, that had strayed down from the good man's college days.

But the shabby little table in the middle of the room, where the evening lamp stood, told a different story. There was a litter of woman's work upon it, and a medley of children's play-things. Two rag-babies, their flat faces adorned with charcoal features, were snugly tucked away to sleep in a little cradle that stood by mother's rocker, keeping close company with a huddle of little shoes—stub-toed affairs, that had done a deal of pegging-out in their time,

and would do a deal more before they were dismissed from active service. There was one tiny pair of finer leather than the rest, half trodden over at the heel by a baby's uncertain steps—shoes such as a loving, impulsive woman might take in her hand and kiss.

On the arm of an old lounge, with a bed-quilt tucked over it, because the cover had given out past repair, was piled a heap of little clothes—jackets and trowsers, frocks and aprons, the bodies and sleeves still imprinted with a warm, live look.

Two bedrooms opened out of this living apartment, and received the overflow of its precious heat into their chilly depths. One was the room of the poor minister and his wife ; and there, under the patchwork spread, lay the baby, scarce two years old—a chubby, dimpled thing, with shining rings of hair all moist about the blue-veined temples, and a plump thumb held in the puckers of the pink lips.

In the other bedroom five little folks were snugly tucked in the trundle-bed and the high four-poster. I do not know exactly how they slept—whether in tiers or rows, spoon-fashion or criss-cross.

There had been no squabbles with mother that night about going to bed early. The sooner the house quieted down the better for sly old Saint Nick.

To be sure, Simon and John—rugged little fellows with chapped cheeks and good hard fists—would make occasional forays into the sitting-room in their night-drawers, with hair very much on end, just to see that their stockings hung in exactly the same spot where they had been left. I cannot conceal the fact, either, that the whole five frequently sat up in “end,” and churned the pillows, and tossed the quilt in a storm of glee, because it was Christmas! dear old Christmas! blessed old Christmas!

The tricky Christmas spirit had crept through the keyhole, or had slyed over the threshold of the little Puritan parsonage, and was making the air ruddy and sweet, in spite of all the good minister’s qualms of conscience.

Sleep now kissed the children’s eyelids, and molded their limbs to fair, still lines. Little Sarah hugged her luckless doll, from whose body the sawdust had nearly leaked out. Master Simon clutched in his puffy hand two prime

marbles, that would in nowise be safe unless they went to bed with him.

Mrs. Fielder was moving her rose geranium away from the window, where Jack Frost was busy with his silvery etchings, nearer to the fire. It was a great, healthy, bushy creature, that spread out green and strong, and appeared to take life from the woman's finger-tips. She was a spry, slight person, with soft dark eyes, that kindled every time she spoke in a glow of feeling and enthusiasm. Not so young and pretty as she once had been, yet you saw she loved young, pretty things dearly, and had kept all her fresh feelings warm in her heart. Her faded calico dress was exquisitely clean. Over her shoulders she wore a little child's plaid shawl, and a tiny band of blue ribbon was tied about her glossy brown hair, just beginning to show a few silver threads.

"I'm so glad you have come, Reuben," said she eagerly as the minister entered. "It is bitter cold, and I was afraid you would frost your feet ; those miserable old boots are such a poor protection."

"I scarcely realized that it was cold," replied Mr. Fielder, hanging his shawl and hat on a

peg. "I must have been very much absorbed in thought, for my toes do ache now as I come near the fire."

The stoop in the parson's high shoulders showed plainer than before. It was easy to see that he had traveled some distance down the shady slope past middle age. His loose, electric hair was turning very white at the edges, and the care-lines in his face were strong and deep. The intensely serious air of the man of God bore a trace of self-depreciation—a much-enduring, long-suffering shade—as though he supported life because his Master willed it, while the glow and splendor of ecstatic Christian experience but seldom flooded his breast.

"Here are your slippers, ready toasted," said the little wife as she hurried to draw the one stuffed, high-backed rocker up before the stove.

He sat down dejectedly, and spread his long hands to the heat.

"I am so glad, Reuben, you have come just in time to see me stuff the Christmas stockings," said Mrs. Fielder gleefully, her eyes fondly shining on a line of little stockings, six in number, that were securely pinned to the mantelpiece with kitchen forks. They tapered

down from Tom's sock, half man's size, to the baby's, of soft blue and white wool, still marked with the prints of the little pink toes and the pretty bulge of the heel.

"Isn't it a lovely sight, father? Doesn't it warm your very heart to think of the comfort the dear children are every-where taking in the thought of Christmas? Look," continued she, tripping in and out of the bedroom with some parcels in her hand, "here are five sticks of sugar candy, and four bull's-eyes, and a paper of peppermints. I've got a pair of speckled mittens for each of the boys, and some wristlets for the girls; and I think I shall manage to put a cherry-cheeked apple and three pennies into every toe."

"Why don't you save your little gifts until to-morrow, Mary," inquired the parson without raising his head, "and not keep up in the children's minds this delusion about Santa Claus?"

"Delusion!" repeated the little woman impulsively, going away from the table where she was sorting her things, and kneeling down by her husband's side—a favorite attitude with her when she wanted to bring him round to her

way of thinking, which happened pretty often—"surely, there can't be any harm in it. What would life become if all our innocent delusions were stripped away, and the children were robbed of their good fairies?"

"We had better teach them more about their good angels, Mary, and the providence of God."

"Surely, these *are* their good angels, under the dear old familiar names. - We might as well try to take the gold out of the sunshine as Santa Claus out of Christmas." She drew a little nearer to him, and held her face up to his in a fine glow. Somehow the minister's arm slipped gravely round her, and their two work-worn hands were clasped together.

"Don't you remember, Reuben, when you were a little shaver yourself, how you used to scamper out of bed early Christmas morning to find what Santa Claus had brought?"

"No, Mary. There was no Christmas in my childhood; nothing but grinding poverty and hard work." The minister paused, as if going back over some of life's stormy ways. "You know I was twenty-one," he resumed, "and had served out my time on the old farm, when

God plucked me as a brand from the burning, and I felt myself called to labor in the Master's vineyard. I had to educate myself, Mary, even at that late day, for father never made much account of schooling for his boys. Poor old man! He had as heavy a load to carry as he could stagger under, and I don't complain. You remember those old college and seminary days, Mary; how I hired out summers, and taught school winters, and screwed and screwed and pinched, and yet went hungry more than once."

"Don't I remember them, though!" cried Mrs. Fielder, breaking in, for she saw the minister was much depressed. "Those were the days when we were keeping company. Each one seems as beautiful as a picture-leaf bound in a golden book—the story of our love, Reuben. Such a humble, cheap, common little love story, but O so sweet, so precious! We could not spend much time together, could we, dear?—only a few snatched moments now and then. But how easy it made our work! I was a sewing-girl, poor and uneducated; and it always did seem strange that you should have chosen me when there were so many superior women, with well-stored minds, who would have

filled the station far better. Yes, and they would have jumped at the chance, too. Don't you remember that walk we took one spring afternoon, down by the brook, where the pearly-faced anemones were beginning to peep from under the old moss-grown logs, and how you read me your first sermon? O it was so beautiful! I never heard any thing quite equal to that discourse. I never told you, did I, Reuben," she went on, "how I had to pay for those walks with night-work—way on, sometimes, into the morning? It was such hard tugging to get along even then. But I wouldn't have missed Christmas for the world. I always managed to buy some presents for my little brothers if I had to do without a winter frock or a pair of shoes, and their delight made it all up to me."

"Don't you know, Mary"—and the minister's voice sounded very solemn and uncompromising—"I once preached a sermon proving conclusively that we have no authority for Christmas, in the Bible or out of it, and that it ought to be abolished, because it tends to dissipate the mind, and draw our thoughts from the great realities of death and eternity?"

"Abolish Christmas? O Reuben!" and she crept a little nearer, and pressed her cheek against his rusty coat. "Cloud the brightest spot in the whole year? Make the world darker and harder for little children, and poor folks, and all to whom holidays come but seldom, and are like angels' visits? You must have preached that sermon out of your head, and not out of your heart, because there were no memories to plead for dear old Christmas. You had a hard time when you were a child, and your mother died too soon to cultivate your sentiment. Now, I think I have a little sentiment—just the least bit, and you don't know how easy it makes poverty. You have sometimes feared that I was worldly-minded. Old Mrs. Kittery made a fuss because I wore a pink artificial in my bonnet; she thought it was too gay for a minister's wife. I do love pretty things dearly, Reuben; but do you know this old carpet I have patched and mended shines in my eyes as flowered velvet never could? It seems printed all over with baby footsteps. That cradle-bed, where our little boy and girl died, is so holy I think the angels must watch beside it day and night. I feel like leaving a space between Tom's stock-

ing and Sarah's, just where they came in, to show their place is kept."

"Well, well, Mary," said the minister, a good deal softened, "take your own course, I won't interfere, neither can I participate. There is something weighing on me. I am sorry it has come just at this time, for your sake."

The little wife looked up, startled. "Did any thing happen at the prayer-meeting to-night, Reuben?"

"Just what I have long been expecting." His tone was one of deep despondency. "The deacons notified me that they would call here to-morrow, at three o'clock, on important business connected with the Church. There has been a growing dissatisfaction in the minds of the people. I am afraid my usefulness has died out in this community. I am afraid I have failed to reach the hearts of sinners, though, God knows, I have tried to preach the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. They want a young, live preacher, and I can't blame them. I sometimes think that poverty, and the dread of debt, and the children coming so fast, have kept me under, so that I am not more than half the man I might have been, if I did begin late."

"Don't say that, Reuben. You know the children haven't made us a bit poorer. We have always welcomed them like holy gifts out of the bosom of God."

"Yes, yes, Mary; and they were all born here, weren't they? This was our first home, and our only home; and over there in the burying-ground are those two little mounds. There never was a better or a kinder people than ours. They are poor farmers, and the land is lean; and then they have found it hard work in some seasons to scrape together the salary. But they have given us so much good-will, and confidence, and affection, our heart-strings are all knit together; and now, Mary, we must go away."

The minister stopped just in time to save his show of manliness, and something like a sob appeared to choke him.

The little wife got her arms round the tall man's neck, and drew his face close to her dear woman's bosom.

"Don't, Reuben, don't! I am sure it can't be as you think. Why, only to-day that good Father Mead brought us a plump Christmas turkey; and little Hattie Frisbie came lugging a basket of cranberries. The Frisbies, you

know, are poorer than we are. Mrs. Belknap sent a box of honey. They do love us, Reuben ; nobody ever finds much fault, except old Mrs. Kittery. She thinks she has arrived at a state of perfection, and that it's a Christian duty to criticise the minister. You know she stirred up the people's minds before, because I wasn't president of the Mite Society, and didn't teach in the Sunday-school, when I had two babies in my arms. It all died out then, and so it will now. We have seen darker days than these, dear husband, and God brought us through them because we trusted him. Don't you remember that time when the salary was unpaid for three quarters, and we got out of almost every thing to eat, because we were too proud to ask help, and would not run in debt—don't you remember what a time the people made when they found it out, and what a rousing donation they gave us, and how Deacon Hartley sat there in the corner with his back turned and cried half an hour ? O, Reuben, they can't send us away ! But, if they should, we are spared to each other ; the children are with us ; and there is love, light, and hope, and trust in God, shining all around."

"Bless you, wife, bless you!" said the minister in a broken voice. "The way seems dark to-night, but I can thank God for you. Now, wont you go and get the Bible, our stay and comfort in the hour of need?"

She went and brought the Bible, and laid it before him under the lamplight, open at the sweet old story of the shepherds who followed the star until it stood still over the manger where the young Child lay. He read it, and then the leaves turned, as if of themselves, to the fourteenth chapter of John, and he began slowly, trying to steady his voice the while: "Let not your heart be troubled." The good man's heart was so deeply troubled that the precious words of consolation thrilled upon it like an exquisite pain. He got quickly down on his knees; and his little wife, with her apron to her eyes, came and knelt by him, and put her hand in his, and together they went through the gates of prayer.

Next morning there were no lazy bones among the little Fielders. They all got out of bed exactly the right way, though some popped out at the head, and some at the foot, and the chubbiest ones rolled off. The baby—"Bir-

die," as she was called—scrambled over her father in the hot pursuit of "'hismas," with the flaxen hair hanging in her blue eyes. O! if you could have seen them pat and fondle their stockings, and make much of their poor little presents, you would have laughed and cried at the same moment.

"Merry Christmas!" was shouted by six childish voices into the drowsy ears of the good parson and his wife. They openēd their eyes in time to see the snow-fields begin to shine, and rosy clouds advance along the East, tinging the fair cheek of the sky up to the white moon, that looked like an angel left out by accident when heaven's gates were shut. A lovely Christmas dawn, with the air still sweetened by the song of angels and of morning stars.

The minister awoke with a sense of trouble and heaviness of heart.

"'Merry Christmas!'" said he with a sigh, glancing out over the shooting frost-crystals on the pane; "what have I got to do with Merry Christmas?"

"Don't look on the dark side, Reuben," and Mrs. Fielder untied her night-cap. "This beautiful morning seems to give me good cheer."

"I scarcely slept at all," responded her husband, drawing on his old patched boots. "But during the night-watches my mind hardened around a purpose. This visit of the deacons, Mary, can have but one meaning. There have been too many whispers and complaints of late for me not to heed them. If I cannot break the bread of life to this people it is my plain duty to go away. Neither is it seemly that I, though the very least of God's servants, should have the door opened and be thrust out. No, no!" and he grew tremulous and excited, "I know too well what belongs to my calling. I will write my letter of resignation this very morning. We must try and afford a fire up in the study just this once, for I have need of being alone to collect my thoughts."

"Don't do any thing rash, Reuben," responded Mrs. Fielder imploringly. "I am sure that story Jane Taylor brought the other day—because she said we ought to know it—came from Mother Kittery, and the congregation don't indorse her, by any means."

But the minister's determination was not to be shaken. "Don't take the trouble to call me to breakfast," said he as he pulled on his shab-

by coat. "I sha'n't feel like eating any thing, and I want to keep my head clear."

"I would not fast on Christmas morning," pleaded the little woman. "Besides, we are going to have a treat of honey on our buckwheat cakes. It is two weeks now since the butter gave out and the molasses-jug ran dry. Not but what butter and molasses are luxuries we can very well dispense with ; only the children have such a sweet tooth 'it makes one happy to see them gratified.'"

By ten o'clock the Christmas turkey was stuffed. All the young fry had a hand in the operation. One sprinkled the summer-savory, another scattered the sage, and a third added tiny pinches of salt. Then the noble bird was sewed up—a proceeding most fascinating to the juvenile mind—and consigned to the oven. Immediately a ring of chairs was formed close round the stove, and the young Fielders mounted guard, prepared to watch every phase of that estimable fowl's development.

"It's about time for the old fellow to begin to fizzle, aint it?" said sturdy little John, dabbling his toes in the ashes on the hearth.

"Yes; there, he's just tuning up!" cried

Simon from under "Birdie," who sat in his lap in a smothering way, as she happened to be only half a size smaller than he was.

Hidden away in the oven was also a cranberry tart; and the ear that could distinguish the fizz of the tart from the faint sputter of the turkey was considered a very discriminating and sagacious organ. Little Sarah held the basting-spoon between whiles, as a special favor; and when Mrs. Fielder opened the oven-door, and let out a cloud of savory steam and a louder hiss than usual, the excitement was intense. The boy or girl who hadn't tasted turkey at least six times was considered hardly respectable.

"When is a nose not a nose?" inquired Tom, as the nice smells began to grow stimulating to his olfactories.

Every body looked hopelessly puzzled, and Tom had to explain his own joke, which is always disgusting to a wit: "When it's a pair of snuffers," said he, and went right up to the pinnacle of glory.

The sitting-room was warmed, just for this extra occasion. Mrs. Fielder excused the extravagance, because there was "company com-

ing by and by," and sighed as she did so. The table was set in there, and the rose geranium placed near for a Christmas green.

"I will make a cup of tea for father;" and she took two fine pinches from the very bottom of the canister. "Poor dear father hasn't eaten a mouthful to-day. Go up to the study, Anna, and ask him to come down to dinner."

Mr. Fielder came down, with bloodshot eyes, looking haggard and aged. The good wife had set the easy chair for him; and the sight of the nice dinner, so unusual in the parsonage, must have touched his heart, for he uttered a fervent blessing to God.

"Come, father, do try and eat something," said Mrs. Fielder anxiously, as she saw him playing with his knife and fork.

"No, no! I haven't a bit of heart for food."

"See if this wont relish," and she slipped a large wedge of the cranberry tart upon his plate.

"I can't. There's no use trying." He pushed it back with nervous hands, and got up from the table. "The letter is written," said he in a low tone; "you see I could not trust myself to say all when they came. My heart

might be in my mouth. I will go out now and take a walk in the fresh air ; and perhaps, God willing, it may give me strength to do my duty like a man."

Mrs. Fielder followed him to the door, and watched him stooping down the snowy path, with brimming eyes.

Just before the parson got back from his walk Deacon Hartley and Deacon Spinner drove up in a fine two-horse sleigh, drawn by a spanking pair of bays, that skimmed over the smooth track, and shook off innumerable sprays of music from their silvery bells.

Deacon Hartley was like a great glowing furnace you could warm your hands by the coldest day in winter. His nose resembled that famous tower that looketh toward Jerusalem ; and when he winked and screwed up his capital old face, with a glint of sunshine in every separate wrinkle, you felt as if he were leaving you a legacy. Deacon Spinner was a little hatchet-faced man, and his religion did not seem to liquefy, as Deacon Hartley's did, and get into his blood and bones.

John opened the sitting-room door to the visitors, for Mrs. Fielder had slipped out to

await her husband's coming. The big deacon shambled in hurriedly ; and, with rather a sneaking air, chucked a big store-bundle he carried down in one corner, and laid his coat upon it. It is safe to say that in less than two flirts of a lamb's tail he was sitting down to warm his hands, with "Birdie" on one knee and little Anna on the other.

Meanwhile Deacon Spinner was drawing out Master John :

"One of these days, my little man, we shall be making a minister of you ; now, sha'n't we?"

"No, sir'ee!" cried John, jingling the three pennies in his trowser's pocket. "Ministers are too poor to suit me. I did think I'd be a stage-driver"—this was deliciously confidential—"but now I guess I'll keep store, and buy my mother some new clothes."

At this moment the door opened, and the minister entered, followed by his wife. He had been over to the burying-ground, and his mind was a good deal steadied ; but still it was plain to see how much he dreaded the coming interview. The greeting that passed between the four was rather constrained ; and then the chil-

dren were sent out, and Deacon Hartley looked at the other deacon, and there was some hemming and hawing.

Presently the minister stood up and took hold of the back of his chair :

“ Brother Hartley and Brother Spinner, I cannot be blind to the object of your visit. It's a painful necessity—” He tried hard to steady his voice.

“ O yes, it is painful, very painful,” responded Deacon Hartley, giving his lean brother a poke in the ribs.

The minister paid no heed, but went right on.

“ If there is dissatisfaction in the Church, and I have outlived my usefulness here, I am ready to resign and give you no further trouble. I would not be a stumbling-stone, God knows.”

As he spoke he pulled the letter of resignation out of his breast pocket, but could not trust himself to go on.

All the sly fun vanished from Deacon Hartley's face ; he sprang to his feet.

“ Resign ? ” said he, half stupidly. “ No, no. You can't mean to go away and leave the old

place, when you and your wife and children are as nigh every one of our folks as their own kin—bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh!" He got hold of the minister's hand with one of his and squeezed it powerfully, while with the other he felt round for his bandanna. "Dissatisfaction in the Church?" he went on; "that's all moonshine. There are some few that would die if they couldn't talk.; but the people's hearts are all with you. I know we've backslid and fell from grace on the salary more than once; but we mean to do better by you in future, for Christmas has come to stir us up to our duties, and make us kinder neighbors and better Christians. You see the people up at Jackson Settlement took a notion to try and coax away our minister with a higher salary; but we have slipped in ahead." And the old fellow chuckled, and wiped his eyes, and blew his nose vigorously. "We mean to offer you as much as they would pay, and make you a Christmas present of a hundred dollars extra."

With this the old deacon fumbled in one of the numerous receptacles of his coat, and pulled out a roll of bills, which he thrust into the minister's hand. Mr. Fielder stood stunned and

speechless ; but his little wife flew at the deacon with a face all tears and smiles :

“ I must kiss you, Deacon, indeed I must ! ”

“ May she ? ” asked the old man, winking away the moisture from his eyelashes, and looking at the parson.

Mrs. Fielder did not wait for permission, and the deed was done heartily.

“ Now let the children in,” cried the glorious old fellow. “ You see the women folks wouldn’t allow us to get the start of them. They took up a collection of their own, and went and laid it out to suit themselves.”

With this he ripped opened the store-bundle, and out popped a fine black overcoat.

“ This appears to be about your size,” said he, handing it to the bewildered minister.

There was a silk dress for Mrs. Fielder, and a prime pair of boots for each of the boys, and a frock pattern apiece for the little girls. It seemed as though the children had been dammed up, just outside the door, ready to burst in at the first signal. The scene was quite beyond my powers of description. Every body was crying, and taking pains to hide the fact from every body else.

"What a kind, noble-hearted people ours is," sobbed Mrs. Fielder, brokenly, as she stroked the shiny folds of her silk.

"Did you ever have a real silk dress before, mother?" whispered Tom.

"Not quite. I had a pongee once, and that's the next thing to it. I hope this invisible green won't appear too dressy for me," she added anxiously.

"Not a mite, not a mite!" said Deacon Spinner, scarcely knowing what he was about.

The smell of new leather was so overpowering, Deacon Hartley asked all the children to take a Christmas ride in the big sleigh.

When the house was cleared Mrs. Fielder turned to her husband with swimming eyes: "I hope this great prosperity won't hurt us, Reuben, or make us forget the Source from whence all good flows." After a little pause she added: "You'll never say another word against dear old Christmas, will you, as long as you live?"

"I will bless God for all his mercies," replied the minister, much melted; "and for all that binds soul to soul, and sweetens the cup of human life."

HULDAH BELLINGER'S THANKSGIVING.

THE great wide, mouthed chimneys of the Bellinger homestead were puffing out volumes of smoke against the clear, sharp cold with that peculiar Thanksgiving "tang" which comes in the early days of a New England winter, after "killing-time" is over, and when turkeys are plump, and the first flurry of snow has powdered the golden stubble of the fields.

The "women folks" in the farm-house kitchen were all astir and bustling with Thanksgiving preparation. The woman element had become the potential one there since Frank, the eldest boy, marched away, in the battle summer of '61, to the forefront of the conflict, and left his young wife and child under the shelter of the old roof-tree.

It was whispered that, even in plain Silas Bellinger's time, the "gray mare had been the better horse ;" but, be that as it may, "Widder"

Bellinger, or Mother Bellinger, as she was more familiarly called, was a distinctive individual—rounded and compacted of such elements of thrift, forehandedness, and faculty as do still largely enter into the composition of New England matronhood.

To a nose practically unacquainted with the smells proper at such a time to Mother Bellinger's kitchen it is impossible to describe the incense that rose up there, and made a sweet savor before the genius of our good old Puritan feast. The fire-board had been removed from the mouth of the great stone chimney, and a broad sheet of flame went streaming up the sooty flue, in rivalry with the fierce draft of the cooking-stove.

Mother Bellinger, of ample, solid proportions, with the sleeves of her stuff gown tucked well up above her broad, dimpled elbows, stood by the table packing a comfortable basket with specimens of flesh and fowl highly suggestive of the season. There was a fat goose, a pair of chickens, a coil of rich sausage, and a well-frozen spare-rib.

“Come, Jack, stir your stumps!” said she to a hardy, thick-set lad of fourteen, who was take-

ing a bite preparatory to going out into the cold.

"I'm on hand, mother, like hot cakes," said Jack, wiping his mouth on his jacket-sleeve, and pushing back his empty plate.

"Bundle up well, and by that time I'll have the basket ready."

Jack accordingly wrapped his tippet around his ears, pulled down the lappets of his cap, and slipped his hands into a pair of blue yarn mittens that came high up on his wrists.

Meanwhile Mother Bellinger was giving directions.

"The sassage and spare-rib, mind, is for Blind Betty. Take the goose to Parson Hazeltine's, and tell Miss Hazeltine to bile it two good hours before she puts it in to bake, or it will be as tough as sole leather. Then drive on to old lady Bascom's with the chickens. Hold a bit, though! I'll just tie them together with a string; and you can hang them on the knob of the door, and give a knock, and slip off behind the wood-pile. I don't want Miss Malviny spreading on the thanks next Sunday, and rubbing 'em in before the whole congregation. She's a good-hearted cretur', but when she gets to going

she hangs on like the tooth-ache. There, now, make tracks !”

Jack grasped the handle of the basket in his mittened hand, and shut the door behind him with a slam ; but he was not to get off so easily. Mother Bellinger, in her energetic way, ran after the lad, and threw up the lower sash of the kitchen window.

“ Jack ! O Jack ! ”

Jack was unhitching Billy (a scrawny old nag, with a hide that looked as if it had yet to be introduced to curry-comb for the first time) and cramping the wagon.

“ Go to Giles’s and git three lamp chimbleys, and a bottle of vernilla extract, a box of Bab-bit’s raisin’ powder, half a dozen lemons, and ten pounds of that A sugar he promised me.”

“ Hold on, mother ! How you do confuse a fellow’s head-piece. Have Huldah write them things down on a piece of paper.”

“ There aint a mite of time. Huldah’s as busy as a bee in a pumpkin blow. Don’t fail to go to the Deacon’s ! ” continued the matron, raising her voice, and leaning her stout person more and more over the window-ledge. “ Tell

him to come and eat dinner with us to-morrow after meeting. He must fetch the girls along, too, or Huldah will be disappointed."

"O mother," cried Huldah Bellinger—a pretty fresh Yankee lass of twenty—from where she sat by the chimney-side, briskly rubbing some old-fashioned silver spoons with whiting and chamois-leather, "you know well enough I never liked the Bridgem girls!"

Mother Bellinger squared round upon Huldah with a frown. "That's your contrariness. It's a real Bellinger streak. I always told your father so when he was alive. It's my right to send what word I please, and when folks come to the house they shall be well treated."

Huldah gathered up the whiting and the silver spoons in her apron, and, with her blooming face slightly discomposed, ran to the window and looked out over her mother's big shoulder.

"Jack! I say, Jack! don't forget to inquire at the post-office!"

Jack was giving Old Billy his head now, and the chips of the back yard were beginning to crunch under the wheels of the one-horse wagon.

"I should like to know who you are expect-

ing a letter from," said Mother Bellinger, closing the window energetically and directing a look of suspicion at the girl's face.

Huldah dropped her eyes on her checked apron with a little tremor of confusion that made her long lashes quiver. "Of course, mother, we are always looking for letters from Frank."

Frank's wife—a fragile little woman with a profusion of dark hair that lay in rings against her white throat and forehead—looked up quickly from the ruddy gold of the pumpkin she was sifting through a cullender in thick yellow drops and spirty streams. Wee Polly, Frank's three-year old darling, stood tugging away at her skirts, in the laudable endeavor to upset the dish.

"What were you saying about Frank, mother?" she asked wistfully. "Do you think there's any chance of hearing from him to-day?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't hear," said Huldah quickly. "If the boys down there in Dixie ever think of home I guess it will be now, at Thanksgiving time."

"I guess so, too," responded Mother Bellin-

ger, softened a little by this speech of Huldah's. "It will be a tough day for many a poor boy in hospital and prison. I don't feel quite so bad for them as are fighting and marching. They can't stop to think, and that's a blessed thing. It does seem unfeeling, though, to feast and rejoice up here, when our own folks are enduring privations and risking their lives down in that secession slaughter-pen. The Deacon says we ought to give thanks that the fight has begun, for it's peaceabler by half than it was before we come to blows; and the Deacon is an uncommon far-sighted man. So was your father. Many's the time he's said to me: 'Mark my word, we shall have trouble with that Southern bowie-knife gentry unless slavery is abolished. We've got to get a log-chain on to it, and rip it up by the roots. I guess old Uncle Abe means to put on the log-chain, for next Jannewary he's promised to free the slaves, and I guess he'll stick by his words. I'd give all I'm worth, twenty times over, to see Frank sit down to dinner with us to-morrow. Nothing would suit me better than to feed the whole rigiment. I'll do it, too, if I live to see the glorious day when the boys come marching home!" Mother

Bellinger brushed something moist away from her eyes with the back of her hand. "It wont be until the whole thing is ended. Massachusetts men don't flinch a hair. They aint the kind to get wounded in the back ; and the Herrick-town boys, God bless 'em ! are as likely a set of boys as ever marched out of the old Bay State."

"You forget, mother, that Sam Raymond is one of them," said Huldah, with a gleam of malice dancing out of her bright eyes.

"You don't let me forget what a sneaking fondness you have for that fellow !" retorted the dame with asperity.

"There is nothing sneaking about it !" exclaimed Huldah, lifting her head proudly. "A brave man, like Sam Raymond, has the right to be loved openly and above board."

"There, now !" exclaimed Mother Bellinger in a taunting tone as she buried her plump arm in a pan of mince-pie meat, "git on to your high horse, and see where it will carry you. Go and take up with them shiftless Raymonds, and give the Deacon the go-by. But, mark me, you can't touch a cent of the property during my life-time ; and I wont see your father's hard earnings, that I helped him rake

and scrape together, go into the hands of that family. It's a poor, low tribe. I don't like the breed. You can't get blood out of a turnip, and there's no use trying. What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. I don't say any thing agin Sam while he's fighting for his kentry ; but none of them Raymonds have ever made their salt. And there's Deacon Bridgem, as forehanded a man as there is in the county, and as good a liver and provider, too. Every body knows what a husband he made Jane Bruce ; and now she's dead and gone, poor thing, I do hope she has the satisfaction of knowing there aint another head-stone like hers in the whole burying-ground."

"I think the Deacon had better be reflecting on his own end," said Huldah, with a toss of her pretty head. "It's about time for him to be attending to the concerns of his soul instead of looking out for a young wife, when he's old enough to be her father."

"It don't make a mite of difference, in my view," retorted Mother Bellinger, stirring the mince-pie meat with a quick, firm motion, "how old a man is if he keeps his young feelings ; and the Deacon is the youngest-feeling man

I ever saw, and he holds his looks wonderfully well."

"Folks' eyes aint all set in the head alike," said Huldah, rubbing away at the spoons. "To my thinking, he'd appear much better if he didn't color his hair and frisk round with the young people."

"You prefer old Nate Raymond when he's just been picked out of the gutter after a drunken scrape!" replied the dame in a biting tone.

Huldah's face flushed, and she bit her lips hard, but did not speak.

"Come, come, Patience!" put in Aunt Suke, a withered old maid with a false front, and a string of gold beads round her neck, and her little black eyes going into total eclipse every time she grew emphatic—"come, come," she said as she split the crisp greening she was quartering with the thin, sharp-bladed bread-knife, "don't bear on quite so hard. Remember what the Bible says about charity: 'Faith, hope, charity, and the greatest of these—'"

"I wont have you quoting Scriptur' at me, Suke," retorted Mother Bellinger, taking her large hand from the pan and holding it up to

save the drip of the mince-meat. "You may be better than I am on the blind passages ; but I know where it says in so many words, 'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away.' There aint nothing between the lids of the Good Book that looks like charity to shiftless folks."

"But can't you allow something for ill luck?"

"Ill luck! Fiddledee! That's just like you, Suke—always arguing. You'd argue the hair off a cat's back!"

Mother Bellinger uttered the last words as she swept with a heavy tread into the buttery—a famous New England institution, with scoured shelves, spotless and white ; with rows of milk-pans, where the rich cream had set in thick, yellow folds ; with little squads of jugs and jars, a small army of fruit-cans, a crock of doughnuts, and the corner sacred to "cold victuals."

Huldah let the silver sugar-tongs she was rubbing drop from her hands, and turned desperately toward Letty, Frank's wife, who had now put down the pan of pumpkin, and taken little Polly into her lap.

"O Letty! I wouldn't marry Deacon Bridgem if he was made of solid diamonds! It will

come to swords' points between mother and me ; for she is as set as a meeting-house, and so am I."

"Hush!" said Aunt Sukey under her breath, holding up her finger and giving a succession of quick little nods toward the buttery door. It was easy to see which side her sympathies were on. Faith in love-matches had not yet quite died out of her old heart.

"May be it will turn out better than you think," whispered Letty, squeezing Huldah's hand very hard.

"No, no ; the Deacon means to propose to-morrow!" The little, determined-looking face crimsoned all over. "I know he does, for mother has hinted as much ; and he's taken the weed off his ugly old hat ; and the Bridgem girls look at me as if they wanted to scratch my eyes out. O what a miserable Thanksgiving this will be !"

"Hush!" Mother Bellinger came back with a bottle of boiled cider in her hand. "I want you to taste of this pie-meat, Letty. Seems to me it would bear a leetle grain more sweetening. I've tasted so much I aint no judge. I'm afraid it aint quite the ticket. You see, the

Deacon is teetotal; and, out of respect to him, I have to disguise the brandy. But, to my mind, a mince-pie aint worth the name unless it has a strong twang of the O-be-joyful."

Letty put down little Polly, who didn't relish being "turned off" at all, and went to do her mother-in-law's bidding. Little Polly whimpered, with her two dimpled fists in her eyes, until she was attracted by the contents of Aunt Huldah's lap. "What's dat?" said she, shying her mischievous fingers into the soft, mealy stuff, and looking out with her blue peepers, through a tangle of silky hair, at the antiquated sugar-tongs Huldah was gloomily polishing. Huldah crooked one arm round the little creature. "That's a big B, Pol, and it stands for Bellinger."

"And for Bridgem too," put in Mother Bellinger, with a wink. "My mother made me a present of them the day I was married; and I always calculated they should go to Huldah, with a dozen of the best tea-spoons."

"It wouldn't be no great chore to change the tail of the B into an R," remarked Aunt Sukey demurely.

"It would be the hardest thing you or any

body else ever undertook to do," replied the dame, bringing down with a clash the long-handled iron spoon she held among the blue-edged pie-plates on the table.

Poor Huldah dropped her head, and looked gloomier than ever. She felt perfectly certain that the tail of the big B would never get magically whisked into an R.

The baking and brewing proceeded toward a happy climax. The atmosphere was floury and sweet with spices. Mother Bellinger ruled the situation like the general-in-chief of domestic managers. "You'd better get the big oven agoing," said she to Frank's wife; "by the time it's het I'll have a batch of pies and cake ready to go in. Here, Jane," to a little, quiet, flaxen-haired girl, who sat on a cricket seed-ing raisins, enjoying intensely the stickiness of her fingers—"you go and tell Rafe to bring in an armful of oven-wood; and, while he's about it, he can fetch the table down from the spare chamber and splice it on to the other one."

"Now I think of it," continued Mother Bellinger, with her arms akimbo, "I'll plan to invite the Deacon to carve the turkey; he asks such a beautiful blessing. Your Uncle Free-

man would do very well ; but then he aint a professor."

" Uncle Freeman sent off three boxes to the Sanitary Commission last week," said Huldah ; " and I know he gave a thousand dollars toward helping out the soldiers' bounties. I haven't heard of the Deacon's putting his hand in his pocket once since the war began."

" The Deacon knows how to keep tight hold of the purse-strings," remarked Letty quietly as she let down the oven-door and took a peep into its cavernous depths. " Frank used to say a silver dollar looked as big as a cart-wheel in his eyes."

" I don't care a hooter what any body says," returned Mother Bellinger. " The Deacon is a just man—just before he is generous. If old Nate Raymond hadn't been as easy as a tow-string, and gone security for Morse, he might have owned as good a farm as there is in the township this very minute."

" Will there be spoons enough to go round ?" inquired Aunt Sukey, trotting up to the table, where the gleaming pile of silver lay.

" I don't know," said Mother Bellinger, cheerfully giving way to the spirit of the occasion.

"We must count noses and find out. There'll be a good solid tableful. I'm cut up, Suke, about one thing; we'll have to skimp on the quinces. They was so skurce this fall I didn't do up any, and there aint but one jarful left over. I'll put them close by the Deacon, for he's particularly fond of quinces; and, when they're passed, you'd better not take any. Huldah must sit at his right, and help to the cranberry sauce. I'll stand the high dish, with the jelly in it, over in front of him. It does me good to see the Deacon walk into a Thanksgiving dinner. He takes hold as if he knew what good eating was. I always thought he'd be one of the best of men to cook for."

Just then Rafe, the hired man, appeared at the door, bringing a bundle of spruce sticks, fresh-cut, sweet, and virginal, from the woods, with little tufts of evergreen foliage clinging to the brown bark. Rafe was a slouching, red-bearded individual, clad above in a knit jacket, while his ill-matched legs took refuge in a pair of linsey-woolsey trowsers. He was followed closely by little Jane, her delicate skin, even to the tips of her ears, all pink with the kiss of the cold; and by another child, taller than Jane, and

larger of her age. This new comer hung back, as if not quite sure of a welcome, and twisted her little chapped hands in the folds of her faded calico dress, patched and mended with shreds of divers colors. She appeared to be chronically afflicted with "goose-flesh," from her blue lips down to her miserable little toes, that peeped through the loop-holes of a dilapidated pair of shoes.

"Why, it's Martha Raymond" said Aunt Sukey in her chirrupy way. "Walk right in, child, and warm yourself. You look half froze. We're having an uncommon cold snap for this time o' year. How's your ma's health, Martha?"

"She's pretty slim, thank'ee ma'am. It is as much as she can do to keep round. She said maybe Miss Bellinger would lend her a drawing of tea. Father was took with one of his dizzy turns last night, and he'd like to get a little camfire to snuff. If you aint going to use your flats to-morrow, and there's no objection, our folks would like to borrow 'em. And, please ma'am, can't Jack keep his chickens from scratching under our back gate?"

"Jack must put his chickens through a course of sprouts," said Letty, smiling, with her delicate

face rosed by the glow from the oven-mouth, where the fire began to crackle. "But don't you know, Martha, to-morrow is Thanksgiving day? Folks here in New England don't work on that day. I mean, of course, as they do other times."

"It don't make a mite difference over to our house," retorted Martha. "But I guess bimeby we shall fix up and be like folks, for our Sam's a kunnel now."

This announcement was made with a directness which caused a sensation in the Bellinger kitchen. Aunt Sukey almost let the platter of frothy white stuff she was beating up for icing to the pound-cake slip off her lap, while her eyes went into total eclipse.

"My stars and garters, Martha, how you talk!"

Huldah sprang round from the place where she stood by the molding-board, marking small circles with the cake-cutter on a thin sheet of brown dough, and a telegraphic message passed between her face and the face of the child.

"What's that I hear?" cried Mother Bellinger, sharply. "Sam Raymond a colonel? Humph! When you catch me believing that story you'll catch a weasel asleep."

"It's a fact," spoke up Martha, with spirit. "Ben Allen brought the news last night from the Junction, and he says it has got into the papers."

"More than one lie gets into the papers. I sha'n't put no faith in it until I hear what the Deacon has got to say. To be sure, the bravest or the deservingest don't always git promoted. There must be some mighty poor timber among the officers, or that fellow Miles wouldn't have been allowed to cut up such a shine as he did at Harper's Ferry."

Letty saw a tempest brewing on the curl of Huldah's lip, and she made haste to disperse its lightnings silently.

"Wait and see, mother. I don't know why Sam Raymond isn't as likely to rise as any other man."

The widow gave a scornful toss to her cap-strings. There were reasons in her own mind why Sam Raymond wasn't as likely to rise as the majority of men in general, and her boy Frank in particular. She stepped to a corner cupboard and took 'down a blue tea-cup from the top shelf, where it had evidently been kept for this special emergency.

"Here, Martha, is the tea your mother sent home last time. It aint the kind I use in my family, and she's welcome to it."

"I don't believe Mattie has had a sip of sweet cider this fall," said Aunt Sukey. "Jane, couldn't you run down stairs and draw her a mugful?"

Jane's little feet pattered down the cellar stairs, while Martha sat on pins; but when, later, the mug was grasped in her hands, and the good stuff tickling her throat, the childish soul within her expanded.

"Jen," whispered she, "have you got any spruce-gum?"

"There's a lovely hunk behind the cupboard door; it's Jack's, though."

"If you'll give me a piece," responded Martha magnificently, "I'll let you feel of my loose tooth."

After the neighbor's child was gone, Widow Bellinger did not choose to comment on the news she had heard; she was content to put it in her pipe and smoke it. Huldah did the same, although a gleam of exultation would now and then dance out of the corner of her eye.

A breathing-spell had come in Mother Bell

inger's day. She had seen the pies—mince, apple, and pumpkin, committed to the depths of the great brick oven. There they were fizzing and sputtering away in darkness. There, too, were the pound-cakes, and fruit-cakes, with spatters of plums over their hillocky surfaces, and the fair loaves of rye and "Injun" bread; and the great "Injun" pudding, that would bake all night and secrete a whey of the richest red; and the pan of sweet apples, that sputtered spitefully, and gathered a clear jelly about their globes as they grew browner and browner.

"I'm all het up from being over the fire so long," said Mother Bellinger, taking a last squint into the oven. "That pudding is coming on beautiful. How I wish Frank could have a taste on't. He always said nothing ever touched the right spot like mother's Injun pudding. Now, girls, you may wash up the cooking-dishes; and I guess I'll set down and rest my old bones."

The dame's ample proportions just filled snugly her favorite chintz-covered rocker, with no room to spare. She sat in a golden stream of November sunshine, that fell through the

south window and touched a light stand, with Aunt Sukey's note-book upon it, open at the Nineteenth Psalm, and her wicker-work basket, where showed the toe of a soldier's blue yarn stocking, and, underneath, the lid of her old-fashioned shell snuff-box. By the south window, in May, expanded great bunches of "motherly" lilacs; and the slim bodies of bees slipped through them like fairy shuttles of brown, and flies fizzed and buzzed, and yellow butterflies hovered, and now and then a humming-bird flashed past, like a palpitating emerald set with diamonds.

The lilac twigs were stripped now, and a stretch of the Herrickton road could be seen, leading past bare, restful fields. Who looking out of the window at the pure and peaceable heavens could believe that war was raging through the land! Mother Bellinger sighed as some such thought came into her mind.

"Sissy, wont you fetch me Frank's last letter, and my specs from off the clock-shelf, yonder? It's nigh on to six weeks since we heard last, and I'm beginning to get oneasy. But the Deacon said we couldn't expect to hear yet awhile, for the boys are on the march."

The matron opened her soldier-boy's letter—that precious letter, written, perhaps, by the blaze of a camp-fire after a long day's tramp in the wet—at the well-worn folds. Little Polly sidled up, holding Daisy, her white kitten, in a tight squeeze, without regard to that part of the feline organism known as the insides.

“Danma,” said she, looking up archly, “Polly wants to be taket.”

“Come along, then, Ma'am Doodle ;” and the child and kitty nestled in Mother Bellinger's broad lap.

Wee Polly's restless, sunny head went bobbing about between the dame's specs and the words she was trying to decipher. Daisy's pink claws got tangled in her cap-strings ; but still, with the letter held high up, she strove to con over its meanings.

“It's the beater of all,” whispered Aunt Sukey to Letty, “to see how sister humors that child. 'Taint the way she served her own ; they had to walk Spanish. I can see that sister fails every year ;” and Aunt Sukey shook her head dolefully.

At last the intense quiet of the piece of road visible from the window, with the sunlight

splashing through the attenuated shadows of a clump of buttonwood trees that stood beside the gate, was broken, first by Bose, the watchdog, who came trotting along, with his red tongue dangling from his mouth, and afterward by Old Billy's jog and the rattle of the one-horse wagon.

"Hurray!" shouted Jack before he had pulled up at the hitching-post and jumped out on the door-step. "Hurray! hurray! Our Herricktown boys have had a healthy old brush with the rebs, you had better believe. After a two-hours' fight the scamps skedaddled, and left a hundred and fifty on the ground. We didn't lose a man, and had only ten wounded."

"Did you hear who they were?" inquired Letty, taking her hands out of the dish-pan, and running forward with pale face.

"No, I didn't. There's been skirmishing all along the front for a month or six weeks. The guerrillas are as thick as spatter, and the boys mean to clean 'em out. O! you ought to have seen them blasted Copperheads squirming up there at the store! Some of 'em had bet that our regiment wouldn't smell gunpowder this year, because they didn't have a chance to go

in at Antietam. Sam Raymond is a colonel, sure pop—”

Jack's volubility was here cut short by Huldah, who threw her arms round the lad's neck and kissed his ruddy cheek with enthusiasm. “O Jack, you're the best boy that ever lived ! Did you bring me a letter ?”

“No. But here's one for mother.” And he pulled out a yellow envelope, and tossed it into the dame's lap.

“I don't know the handwriting,” said Mother Bellinger, with a touch of disappointment. “It looks as if it had been all round the gould.” She slit off the end of the cover. And Sukey came forward, and stood listening, with a wiper in her hand.

“Dear mother,” ran the letter, “I write to let you know that I got a scratch on the arm in last Tuesday's skirmish. The papers, likely, have told you all about it ; you wont be ‘scart’ if you see my name among the wounded. Our boys were ‘spiling’ for a fight ; and went in, and cleaned the rebs out on a straight ticket. I can't make much of a fist at writing yet, as my arm is in a sling ; so I have got one of the hospital nurses to write for me. I'm as jolly as

a sand-boy, and no mistake. Don't let Letty cry a whimper about me. Tell her we lame ducks mean to be out Thanksgiving day, hurrahing for the folks at home. I shall toast her and little Pol in sweet cider that some of our contrabands 'fisticated' from a long-haired butternut native. The box you sent came all right, and was as welcome as molasses in fly-time. Tell Aunt Sukey her socks were just the dot.

"The biggest piece of news I've got for you is that Sam Raymond has been promoted to the colonelcy. We never knew what stuff that fellow was made of until we got down here at the post of danger. He's the grittiest chap and the coolest hand you ever saw. He handled the regiment twenty times before Ranny was suspended for drunkenness. We sent him up to Washington, with a complaint against Ranny, and Uncle Abe saw through him as straight as a line, and put him in Ranny's place. And there isn't a man of us that don't sanction the choice. Sam is the true blue in his principles. He don't smoke or drink a drop. I guess he's seen enough at home to turn him against it."

Here the letter broke off, and was renewed in a weak, trembling hand. "I want to say a

word myself, mother, about Sam Raymond. I, practically, owe my life to him ; for I was captured, and being carried off to Andersonville, when he rescued me at the point of the bayonet. If you want to show your gratitude to God for my deliverance from death, or something worse, you will give your consent that Sam and Huldah shall get married. They say the Deacon is shining round Huldah ; and, if I was Sam, I'd pitch into him some day for meddling with my girl. I know you don't like the tribe ; but, from what Sam tells me, I believe his father got hipped with a big misfortune, and then every body was ready to give him a kick. I 'spose I did it, too ; but, now that I've come face to face with the realities of this world, I'm readier to have charity for folks."


Mother Bellinger read the letter, and then she took off her glasses, and folded her hands, and rocked back and forth, with her eyes shut, for some time. Letty read it, and then Huldah. The girl crept near, and laid her face on the dame's coarse apron, and looked up with eager, tearful, imploring eyes.

"Mother, mother, will you consent? Say that you consent!"

Mother Bellinger did not answer directly ; but her hand stole down and touched the silky waves of hair against Huldah's temples. "I'll never say agin that I'll do a thing, for we don't know what we may be led to do. And we had better try and find out what the Lord wants us to do, and follow the pintings of Providence. I must have time to reflect." She was thinking how to pacify the Deacon. "Put on your things, child, and go and ask them Raymōnds to come and eat dinner with us to-morrow—the whole kit, big and little. I don't believe they've had a full meal of victuals for ten years."

Huldah obeyed with alacrity ; and, as her trim figure went tripping along the well-frozen pathway, her glad heart sang as sweet a song of praise as went up that day under the blue New England heavens.

A WREATH OF CHRISTMAS ROSES.

HRISTMAS eve and Christmas cold—the easiest cold that comes in winter time for old bones to bear. A bit of smoothly-trodden roadway, where the snow lay packed like marble. The stamp of the horses' hoofs and the snort of their breath-clouded nostrils had a Christmas ring.

Low in the saffron-hued sky great lambent stars were beginning to twinkle, as they twinkled above Bethlehem eighteen hundred years ago. Upon the roadway, touched with the yellow light of the sunset, stood an old man leaning on his staff. As he turned his roguish eyes, deep set beneath shaggy brows, up to the clear zenith to look for weather signs, two stout, rosy-cheeked lads came swinging along, keeping step and whistling a cheerful tune.

“Look out for a jolly snow-storm, my lads, on the morrow,” cried the old man, greeting them ;

"and a Merry Christmas to you, and God bless your lusty young legs!"

"And God keep your shaky old bones from slipping on this icy track," responded the larger lad.

"A Merry Christmas to you, good Father Barnard," shouted the other, "and to all the boys every-where!"

"Hooray!" cried the old man, swinging his staff gleefully, and straightening up his bent back, while his white locks fluttered bravely out over the edge of his fur collar. "Hooray for the boys, old and young!"

The two lads echoed back his cheer as they pulled on toward where the steeples of the little town shone in the last ray of daylight. The bells were ringing a jangle of silvery Christmas chimes, and the happy people crowded into the shops and made a brave holiday bustle.

"Good luck!" said the old man to himself, looking after the vigorous lads as they breasted the cold, while the hard snow crunched under their pegged shoes. "Mercy Havens is a proud woman to own such a brace of boys—a rich woman, I may say, for they earn day wages now. I did think to send Mercy one of my fat

roasters for her Christmas dinner. I never shall forget how she nursed Angeline through the typhus. No, I never shall forget that. But she is a lucky woman with two such likely lads at work for her ; and little Alice, the envy of half the town."

The childless old man sighed as he trudged slowly homeward under the stars, trying to remember how he used to feel in far-away young days at Christmas time.

It was dark now ; and the lads had reached the town, and were taking part in the pleasant hum that filled the streets. The rubicund, white-aproned butcher stood at the door of his stall, his red, juicy joints of meat adorned with festoons and streamers of gay paper. There were wreaths of laurel looped about the doorway, and a fair array of turkeys and plump chickens, their long necks dangling down as if in punishment for some dreadful crime.

Where the toy-windows shone brightest, lusty Christmas trees, smelling of the woods, were put out as temptations and besetting sins. The crowd was in prime humor, and made merry with young and old. He that could push and elbow the hardest was the best fellow ; and he

that carried the queerest bundle was certainly the jolliest wag.

Miss Mallow's window happened to be the prettiest, brightest bit of holiday beauty in all the town. It did a steady business in caps and bonnets, that little window did ; but the tricky Christmas spirit had changed it to a kaleidoscope of dolls and toys, sugar-plums and enchanting picture-books. High up, nestled against the lace curtains, hung a little tasty blue satin hood, edged with swan's-down.

"Look there," said Robin as he chanced to spy the dainty bit of finery ; "that piece of woman's gear would just suit our little Alice."

"So it would," responded Benny. "She would look like a beauty bright, with the soft white stuff against her cheeks. Let's go in, Rob, and ask the price."

Easier said than done. The people were hustling against each other, and filling the doorway of the small shop with cackles of laughter. Little Miss Mallow had actually mounted the counter, to reach the highest treasures of her realm with a long wand. There she stood, looking like a fairy, set off by a wasp waist and tiny wavelets of blonde hair.

"The blue hood for me, Miss Mallow, please."

"For you, Robin Havens? You are a lucky fellow to secure such a bargain. There is nothing like it out of the city. Now I mistrust somebody is buying a present for little Alice."

"You have guessed right," cried Benny. "And if it were twenty times as fine, it would not be too good for our little sister."

"But the price?" inquired the more cautious Robin, turning the dainty bit of millinery upon his red knuckles.

"Three dollars, my lads, and very cheap at that."

"Three dollars!—almost two thirds of our week's earnings," whispered Benny. "But how could we better spend the money? And to think we earned it all for Alice with good, honest work!"

The hood was secured, amid proud swellings of their boyish hearts.

"We will take this fairy tale, too," said Benny, fingering a pretty red volume that lay upon the counter. "Alice makes a master hand at reading. She will have it all by heart in less than a week. I and Rob are dull chaps with our books; but Alice is a rare, fine scholar."

"We mustn't forget mother," put in Robin. "She shall have a present, too."

"This gay flower-pot, to garnish the mantel-tree is just the thing for her," suggested Miss Mallow in a blithe chirp; "and the whole, my lads, comes exactly to five dollars."

"How lucky," exclaimed both the boys naively, "that we should have just that money!"

The five dollars were dropped into Miss Mallow's till.

"Come along, Ben," cried Robin, in great glee. "We haven't a cent to jingle in our pockets, but we have enough to show for our cash. It does me good to think how Ally will jump and clap her hands when she sets eyes on these famous presents."

They turned out of the little shop, under the clear dark of the grand old Christmas sky, where the stars were glittering in untold splendor, and fared along, with their arms twined in boy fashion over each other's shoulders, down a steep lane that soon shook off the town, and ran past skeleton trees, and hay-ricks, and a frozen pond. Directly under the hill, backed by some straggling shrubbery, that showed the horizon between its parted fingers, stood a little

gray house. Beneath the low eaves swallows nested in summer, and the boughs of a friendly apple-tree tapped at the chamber windows. Now the pane was etched with fairy frost-work, and the swallows nests were filled with snow, and the eaves wore a garniture of jagged icicles.

In the open doorway stood the good house-mother, saving the flare of a candle with her hand, where the light fell on the well-shoveled pathway and the drifts of snow beneath the little bright windows. She was not young, but her skin had a clean, sweet look, with quite a girl-ish bloom upon it. Her dark eyes were loving and tender. Her pretty soft hair, just turning gray, was smoothed under a plain cap; and the rest of her garb was in the simple fashion of half a century or more ago.

"Lads! lads!" called out Mercy as soon as she heard their steps upon the path. "How late you are to-night. Little Alice is snug in bed, dreaming of dear old Santa Claus; and hard work have I had to keep your porridge warm."

"Don't chide us, mother," answered Robin, as well as he could for running a race with Benny,

to see which should come first to the house-door, and giving back as many good hard snow-balls as he received, "Christmas comes but once a year. The town was as gay as could be, and we loitered along choosing the very finest gift to be found for our little sister Alice. Come and see our braveries, dear mammy," and he gently pushed her through the open doorway.

"But where are your wages, boys?" inquired Mercy with a blank face. "Don't you know I counted on that money to buy the morrow's dinner?"

They were standing in the room now. Robin hung his head, and a blush of shame overspread the frank, boyish brow of Benny.

"All spent, mother; every cent of it. We remembered nothing but the beautiful Christmas time and our little sister's joy."

"You are sad, thoughtless lads," said the dame, trying to look grave, although her eyes would shine on them lovingly. "But your own stomachs must pay the forfeit. To-morrow we shall feast on a flitch of bacon and a brown barley loaf. Our poor old friends will be sadly disappointed; for they count far more on a

toothsome meal than we ourselves do. But I will offer the best my house affords, remembering the Good Book says, 'He that giveth a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple shall not lose his reward.'"

"We don't mind what we have to eat," said Robin—"great rough lads like us. We would rather see Ally happy than have the king's dish—four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie. Don't you remember, mother, you used to call Ally the Lord's present to us when she came the Christmas before poor father died? We were rude, hard-bitted boys until then, and gave you many a heartache. Her loveliness tamed us. We stayed the whole day long beside her cradle, wondering at her blessed little hands and feet and her soft skin. There is no knowing what bad turn we might have taken if she had not been sent to make us fond of our home."

"See," said Benny, holding up the little downy hood on his hand. "Don't it look exactly like her?"

The dame surveyed the gift with glistening eyes.

"You are well-meaning lads," said she—

“as good, loving lads as a mother need ask for ; and I cannot scold you if I would.”

“We will try harder than ever to please you, dear mother,” cried Robin impulsively, kissing her cheek. “But come ; let us put Ally’s presents where her eyes will rest on them the first thing in the morning when she wakes.”

Mercy Havens took the candle from the mantelpiece, and the boys followed her softly to an adjoining room, where, in the quaint white-curtained bed, lay little Alice, with her long fair curls tossed carelessly upon the pillow and her lips just parted by a low, sweet breath. Benny hung over her, and touched the curls with his big hand, as if afraid to tarnish their gold. Robin softly pinned the dainty blue hood to the dimity curtain, and laid the fairy book upon the pillow.

They slipped away again, to eat their supper in the wide, old-fashioned living-room—a room such as we seldom see nowadays, with its spinning-wheel and little flax-wheel in the corner ; its low wall garnished with strings of drying-apples and bunches of golden seed-corn ; its settle by the vast chimney-side ; its polished andirons, and swinging crane, and braided mats, and homely, comfortable chairs.

While the boys ate, Mercy Havens drew a stand, with the old, much-used Bible upon it, to the fire; and, as the light from the red embers played over the page, read the story of the child Jesus laid in a manger, and how the shepherds came by night and worshiped divine infancy; and far up in the stilly sky angels and morning stars sang, "Peace on earth, good-will toward men."

Then they knelt and prayed on the old worn hearth-stone, as simple women and pure young hearts can pray.

When the fire was buried under its gray ash-heap, and the boys had fastened their blue yarn socks to the chimney jam, next to Alice's stocking of soft white wool, with a blessed faith in dear old Santa Claus, they went tiptoeing up chamber to their cold, downy bed, and lay and listened to the discreet creak of the loose board in the kitchen floor. Then all was still and dark, and the Christmas angel spread his white wings over that humble, happy home.

By midnight a wind blew out of the warm south, and kissed away the magic pictures on the windows, and great soft flakes of snow began to fall, padding the window-sills, and furring the

old well-sweep and the knotted apple boughs. Deep and still, soft and silent, fell the snow, as if to smooth the fair page on which the finger of God might write the story of the world anew.

Little Alice woke out of rosy slumber, and sat up in her warm nest, and laughed and clapped her hands with glee. She had spied, by the morning light, the bonnie blue hood and the fairy tale, and that loveliest of fairy tales told out-of-doors. The lads had roused the house betimes with their shouts of "Merry Christmas" They had fingered their stuffed stockings, each with its pair of speckled mittens, its cherry-cheeked apple, and little silver piece snugged into the toe.

Now they were abroad, breaking paths and doing chores, chasing and rolling in merry gambols through the snow-drifts, half buried with mutual peltings. There was no end to the fun, until it came time to build a roaring fire on the hearth. That completed, they brought in armfuls of fragrant evergreens, with patches of virgin snow like white Christmas roses, and dressed the mantelpiece, already adorned with the mother's flower-pot, and stuck boughs

about the windows and above the quaint old looking-glass.

Little Alice tied the hood over her rumpled curls, and clasped the fairy book in her arms, and stole out of bed in her pretty bare feet up to the window.

"Look, mother!" cried she, raising her reverent, childish eyes to the thick-falling flakes. "Our lilac-bush is blowing with white roses, and the barberries by the wall are covered with them, and the porch is filled with garlands."

"Yes, my child," answered Mercy, who was stirring about breakfast. "It looks as if the angels meant to visit us to-day."

"There comes one of your angels now, mother!" cried Robin, picking up little Alice and throwing her on his shoulder. "It's Jonas Sperry, as I live. The old chap is abroad betimes."

"Hush, my boy," answered the good mother, "Take care how you offend one of Christ's little ones. Poor Jonas has been unfortunate from his birth. His mother, I'm told, got sadly scared by a roving Indian. It left its mark on the child, and he has never been quite right in his mind. Methinks the dear

Saviour must look upon him with tender compassion."

The door opened a crack, and a snow-covered head and a dark face, illumined by a pair of wild eyes, looked into the room.

"Any pots and pans that need mending, Mistress Havens?"

"No, Jonas, no. The tinkering is all done to-day. But come in, friend, out of the storm, and dry your wet feet."

Thus bidden the door opened wider, and the whitened figure of the old tinker entered stealthily.

He shook the snow from his rusty coat collar, and tapped his heels against the base-board to free his clogged feet. You saw that he was tall and slender, with an odd stoop in the shoulders. His dark and swarthy face was marked with high cheek bones and lantern-jaws. His black hair fell into his neck and straggled out of a web of cotton handkerchief, with the ends dangling upon his breast. He carried one hand behind him, and worked the long fine fingers constantly. Around his neck hung a green baize bag that contained the tinker's "kit."

"Draw up the big cushioned chair before the fire, Robin; and get the kettle on, to give Jonas a drop of something warm."

The good woman pressed her visitor into a seat, and made much of him. He spread out his chilblained hands to the blaze, with his long sharp nose shining red, and looked about him in suspicious starts when a racking cough would allow.

"Aint there no kettle-bottoms to tinker, or teapot-spouts to sodder, dame?"

"No, Jonas; not to-day. This is the blessed Christmas-tide."

"Christmas, indeed!" repeated Jonas sharply. "That's a day for rich folks, when they feast and make merry. What has such a one as old Joe Sperry to do with Christmas?"

"You are wrong, Jonas," said Mercy, stooping over him pitifully. "It's a day for the Lord's poor, like you and me. It's a little child's day. Don't you remember what the Bible says: 'Unless you become like a little child you cannot enter the kingdom.' And it seems now as if the angels of God had camped round about us."

Little Alice had sidled up, with her finger in

her mouth, and her bright eyes peering curiously at old Jonas, as though she was half afraid to approach too near. The tinker turned now, with a sane, steady gleam in his eyes, and laid his shaky hand on her mat of thick curls, and would have spoken had not the cough seized him just then and bent him double.

“Don’t that cough get any better?” asked the good woman tenderly.

“No, no, dame. It’ll git worse afore it gits better.” He pressed to his lips a bit of rag, that served him for a handkerchief, and drew it back stained with blood.

“Bide!” said she, the tears welling into her soft eyes. “I’ll get you something that will do you good.”

She stepped into the next room, and brought out a roll of flannel and a flask of ointment; then, kneeling before the great Christmas blaze, she held out the flannel to the heat, and afterward, with her dear woman’s hands, she opened the old tinker’s tattered shirt, and spread the ointment upon his aching chest as tenderly as if her lips had pressed a baby’s bosom. Then she applied the nice flannel, and left the poor tramp to bask in an unaccustomed sense of

comfort—dozing, and muttering, and starting out of sleep to cough.

Benny had helped dress little Alice in her prettiest frock, for Benny was as handy as a girl. He had curled her hair and tied her tiny shoes. The lads and the little maid had eaten their breakfast of bread and milk from pewter porringers, sitting on the wide settle. Now it was through with ; and Ally held the fairy book, and the brothers made a little shelter for her with their strong arms. The fire-light rippled over the child's hair, and kissed one side of her delicate face to a deep blush. The intent faces of the lads bent down, their crisp brown locks mingled with the threads of her golden tresses, while she expounded to them about enchanters, and luckless fair ladies, and knights and dragons. It was a lovely picture of boyish worship, and I know not how long it would have lasted, had there not come the faint sound of a violin, played through the thick storm along the highway.

“ There is Scotch Sandy ! ” cried Robin, running to the door and flinging it wide open. Benny and Alice scampered after him ; for Scotch Sandy, the fiddler, was a prime favorite

with them all. They stood in the doorway, cheering him as he made great steps in the drifts, each like a little well, while his old dog Tramp rolled and scampered at his heels, and tossed up the snow with his black muzzle. The big flakes beat against their cheeks like baby palms, and blinded their sight; but all the time Scotch Sandy was scraping out "Bonny Doon," his merry blue eyes and bottle-nose twinkling through the silver fringe that hung upon his red beard and shaggy eyebrows.

"Ha! my callants," cried he, "a Merry Christmas to ye a'. And how speirs the gude mither?"

"Well, Sandy, the Lord be praised," said Mercy, putting her comely head out-of-doors. "Come in, man, and that quickly. Let the dog in, too, out of the storm."

"I am ower thankfu' to be here," said Sandy, shaking the snow from his back, while his mangy cur did the same, "this ingle glint has been like a star on my path o'er many a weary mile. It does my auld eyne muckle gude to see the braw laddies, and the wee lassie, wi' her face like ain o' auld Scotland's daisies. An', to my mind, Mistrees Havens, ye are the ane Chreestian

body o' this town. The ithers clack religion brawly wi' their tongues ; but their hearts an' hands are far fra the puir and needy."

Mercy could not stop to listen to Sandy's preachment ; for there came a knock at the door, and she stepped to open it.

"God save us !" cried she as a bent vinegar-faced old crone met her view. "Bettie Braintree ! Did you snow down hither, pray ?"

"You may well ask," replied the new comer, in an offended tone, giving her skirts a flap. "I'm clean beat out ; but I don't matter to any body if I am. Who cares what happens to old Betty ?—poor old worn-out creatur."

"Gang na' that gate," called out Sandy from where he sat by the fireside, tuning his fiddle with old Tramp between his legs, the dog's ragged ears alop and his hungry eyes looking straight forward. "Teach your tongue a new tune ane day o' the year, Bettie Braintree. Gie it a Sabba-day rest, for I doubt not it is tired of grumblin'."

"Hist ! Stir no' up strife," whispered Mercy as she slipped off old Betty's wet cloak, dried the moisture out of her gray locks, knocked the snow from off her shoes, then led her forward

to a warm seat on the other side of the hearth.

"I wonder at you, Mercy Havens, I wonder much at you, a pious woman," said the old crone, casting an angry glance toward the offending fiddler, "for taking on such a vagabones as that Scotch Sandy. A profane swearer, a dram drinker, besides a player of idle music."

"Sandy is always decent and mannerly in my house, and were he not, how could I refuse him food and shelter? Did not our dear Lord sit down with publicans and sinners? This day of all other days in the year let us strive to imitate his example of brotherly love."

"Fash not your head about auld fule body," muttered Sandy, while the children gathered round his knee and begged hard for a tune. "We hear talk o' the power o' music. Come, freends, join your voices in Auld Lang Syne, for the sake o' them that's dead and gone and some that knew us in better days."

He began scraping out the tune, with his ragged elbow held aloft, and one by one the voices of the company struck into the chorus. Mercy's clear treble was heard above the others.

Jonas' cracked, wheezy voice came in somewhere ; and the high quaver of Poorhouse Betty, as she was called ; and the hearty tones of the lads, and little Alice's sweet child lisplings :

" We'll tak' a cup in kindness yet,
For Auld Lang Syne."

They sang it over and over again. The rafters rang and echoed back the dear old tune, mellowed by a hundred sacred memories. The Christmas-greens shook with the vibration from that strange medley of voices, and not one heart remained unmoved.

" There, noo," cried Sandy as the strain ended, (and even grumbling Betty shied her hand across her old eyes, knocking at the same time the ashes from her short black pipe,) " who'll say that the speerit o' music is no the sweet'ner and purifier o' the world !"

It was noon by the slow-moving hands of the tall clock in the kitchen corner—the good, old-fashioned dinner hour. Mercy laid the clean brown cloth, and brought forth the fitch of boiled bacon, the barley loaf, a pan of milk, and some large blue bowls, one for each person present. Old Betty, meantime, watched her proceedings with dissatisfied eyes.

"I might ha' called at the Squire's kitchen," said she, snappishly, "and got my fill of Christmas turkey and mince pie."

"We a' know," responded Sandy, "what a sharp nose Betty Braintree has for snuffing a good dinner. Gang awa' to the Square's, Betty, or else take what is set before ye, asking no question."

"You are welcome to the best I have," said Mercy mildly. "Let there be peace to add its sauce."

They had just gathered round the board, that queer Christmas party, when there came a series of thumps upon the portal, as if from an old man's staff; and, before even the cry of "Walk in" was uttered, back flew the door, and there stood Father Barnard, his merry eyes winking away the snow, his capital, ruddy old face all wreathed with smiles.

"What did I tell you, lads?" cried he. "Didn't I predict a rousing, old-fashioned snow-storm for the boys? See here, Mercy Havens," as he stamped his feet and shook his fur collar until the brass clasps jingled, "I meant to send you a fat roaster yesternight but it slipped my mind. My head-piece aint as good at re-

membering as it once was. But Angeline cooked it with our own, and the plum-pudding too; and she said not a morsel should pass her lips till she knew it was on your board, for she minds how you nursed her through the fever. We are not ungrateful folks, Mercy Havens. No, no; not quite so bad as that!"

As he spoke he laid something mysterious upon the table done up in a fine napkin, from whence issued a delicious smell. Mercy opened it in quite a flutter of excitement, amid a general glistening of eyes and watering of mouths; and there, behold! a beautiful brown pig and a fair plum pudding still smoking from the oven.

The delight was very general, and had hardly subsided, when voices were heard outside in the storm—happy voices, that sounded like the soft chirpings and twitterings of bird music. This time when the door opened it revealed the pretty form of Grace Marvin, the Squire's daughter, with the hood of her scarlet cloak drawn around her delicate, fair face. She was followed close by her handsome young lover, Robert Granger, who carried a small basket in his hand.

"Dear Mistress Havens," cried Grace, throwing her arms round Mercy's neck and kissing

her warmly, "I would come to see you because it is Christmas day, and I do so love the beautiful white storm. My in-door roses are all in blossom now, and I said the first garland I gather shall go to our good angel Mercy, as she is called by rich and poor."

With this Grace modestly took the basket from her lover's hand and drew forth a wreath of white roses, dewy, tender with petals just blown apart, and lightly laid it on the head of Mercy Havens.

It was a pretty picture ; and the light from that loving woman's eyes fell on her happy children, her poor guests, her kind neighbors, even on the old fiddler's dog, and blessed them one and all.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

THE pallid face of the last day of December looked in at Mr. Endicott's library window. It saw a lofty room, frescoed overhead and carpeted with crimson. The carved book-cases, ranged against the wall, were adorned with the sedate, reflective-looking marble heads of great scholars and thinkers, which reminded one of embodied memory.

Near the heavy library table—a perfect *intaglio* of fruitage and leaves, done in some dark wood—sat Mr. Endicott himself. The red light from the grate caught the projections of the table and the glass doors of the book-cases, and cut funny little capers on the top of Mr. Endicott's bald head.

The master of the house was casting up a long column of figures on the back of an old envelope, and as the sum increased his face darkened, until an unmitigated frown settled upon it.

It was a face designed to be sunshiny and genial. The scattered white hair about the full, round forehead was as silky as a baby's tresses. To be sure, there were some crow-feet marking the corners of the blue eyes, and two strong lines drawn from the handsome nostrils downward, past the curve of the cheek, as delicate and fair-skinned as a girl's; still, Hiram Endicott's face, at its best, was one of Nature's pleasantest invitations to trust, confidence, and good-will.

"Family expenses for the year," muttered Mr. Endicott, with the frown deepening as he rumpled the envelope in his hand and began striding nervously up and down the room. "It's enough to ruin an Astor. How can a man's credit stand with such a pressure as I have got weighing upon me?"

The door opened, and a tidy servant-girl entered, bringing a scuttle of Liverpool coal. The master of the house paused in his walk, and watched her with a glum expression, as if acting a part badly, while she deposited a couple of sizeable lumps of fuel on the declining fire.

"Stop, Ellen, stop. What are you putting on two lumps at a time for? Well, well," he

sighed bitterly, "I believe every body in this house is bound to ruin me."

"Laws, sir," responded Ellen, in surprise, "I thought as how two pieces would keep better'n one."

"You thought!" broke out Mr. Endicott. "What business have you to think?"

The girl bridled, her color rose, and she uneasily tapped her neat shoe against the carpet; but still she was too respectful and well-trained to answer her old master back.

"It's not your fault after all, Ellen," he added, smoothing his chin in the hollow of his hand and looking at her suspiciously out of the corner of his eye; "you are only a cat's-paw."

The girl was mollified at once by his softened tone, as her face showed; but anger gave way to a blank look of wonderment at what he could mean by calling her a cat's-paw.

"Where is your mistress, Ellen, and Miss Grace?"

"Missus, sir, is down in the pantry, superintending the New Year's cakes. You know, sir, she is one as allus attends to such things herself. And as for Miss Grace, she's either feeding her birds, or practicing her pianer-music, or

talking to Mr. Hawley in the parlor; one o' them three things you may be sure of, sir."

Mr. Endicott received the information with a sniff.

"Go and say I want to see them both, immediately, here in the library."

Ellen went out into the hall and shut the door behind her, holding the coal-scuttle in her hand. "Well, now, I never," said she to herself; "if a quare streak haint got a holt of master this time. He's always been the pleasantest, chirpest gentlemuns agoin', and now he's as grumpy and as critchety as he can live. A cat's-paw, indeed! It's not personable for the likes of him to be calling names." And she gave her head a scornful toss.

The front-door bell rang; it rang twice, as much as to say, "I'm cold out here in the nipping wind, and I wish you would let me in to this splendid great house, flooded with summer heat from attic to cellar."

Ellen did not hurry herself about opening the portal. She had not been hired for that purpose. Her mind was admirably adapted to the business of discriminating between the different classes who called at Mr. Endicott's dwelling,

and she regulated her conduct by a sliding-scale of great nicety.

The plain features of the applicant for admission were rendered plainer by the purpling chill that made his very teeth chatter in their sockets. He wore a flat cloth cap over his lank hair, through which his large red ears protruded, and round his neck a large quantity of muffler, considering the rather small quantity of collar which appeared below it. "Dishonest and poor," thought Ellen as he inquired for Mr. Endicott, and her salutation was appropriately short and upper-crusty.

The library door opened. "Good-morning, Mr. Endicott. You see I'm on hand, sir, once a-year, regular." The new-comer's manner was delightfully cheerful, considering how cold he was. He advanced apologetically to the hearth-rug, and pulled a note-book from his breast pocket.

"You have the advantage of me, sir," replied the master of the house stiffly, looking straight before him, and pushing out his under lip until it gave his face an expression of hardness and worldliness that was almost ludicrous.

"Now don't say that, sir!" exclaimed the

visitor, twisting his note-book. "You must know Timothy Bradshaw—Old Tim, as the boys call him. Why, sir, I've paid you a visit about the first of January every year for the last ten years. You see how it is, sir, when the Christmas snap comes and catches a lot of these poor, improvident creatures in its teeth"—(he put his red fingers together to illustrate just how)—"when our folks are overrun, and the soup-tickets go off like hot-cakes, and we don't know which way to turn for Sunday—then I say, There's Mr. Hiram Endicott, he never refused us a donation yet—the man of the liberal heart and open hand."

"Hold!" cried Mr. Endicott, glowering on him. "I'm not that man at all; and my name is Hiram Endicott. If I ever was that man, I understand my duty to myself better now. Humbug and imposture don't go down. I'm too old a fox to encourage pauperism and help on beggary."

"But, sir," broke in the other, in great astonishment, "you have always acknowledged that society has a duty to discharge toward its children, that God's poor must be taken care of."

"God's poor! The devil's poor! I under-

stand all about you canting fellows." It's two words for yourselves and one word for the beggars; now, aint it?" and a most unnatural sneer curled his lips. "You know how to feather your nest, and grind any little private ax of your own, under the name of philanthropy. I can see through you charity fanatics straight as a line."

"Mr. Endicott, don't, sir; don't, I beg." The man grew very white about the gills, and put his hand on his breast, as if something burned through his poor garments. "If you will not contribute to the cause, don't insult it in the person of its agent."

"Insult you, you jackanapes! Get out of my house!" He made toward him, with the blood fairly bursting through the veins of his face, and his fringe of white hair waving wildly.

"Mr. Bradshaw! Hiram! What is the matter?"

The words were spoken, in an accent of pained surprise, by a lady who had quietly opened the door and stood now on the threshold. She was past middle life, slender rather than otherwise, her handsome, mature face being adorned by a row of gray puffs on either side. The lace of

her morning-cap was of the finest, and the silk of her black gown of the softest and richest quality.

"Let the fellow go!" cried Mr. Endicott, more irritated still by the intrusion. "I wont have you interfering, Rachel. Let him go, and never show his face in my house again!"

"Yes, yes, let me go, dear Mrs. Endicott," gasped the district visitor as he slipped past the lady. "It's of no use to say a word."

"What does this mean, Hiram?" exclaimed the distressed wife, going up to him and laying her hand on his arm. "You must be ill, dear, for something very strange and unnatural has come over you within these few days past. You are not your old self at all."

"I'll tell you what has come over me," he exclaimed in a loud, angry voice, shaking off her hand half roughly. "I've waked up to the fact that my family is in league to ruin me. You and the rest mean to send me to the poor-house, with your extravagance. And there you were taking sides with that snuffling fellow, who came and whined round after a subscription; as if a man in my circumstances could afford to throw money into the ditch."

"A man in your circumstances, Hiram!" She spoke soothingly, tenderly, but a dreadful suspicion was darkening her eyes. "Your circumstances are just what they have been for many years past. Your family, in fact, is not so expensive as it once was, now that the boys are married off and in business for themselves."

"Do you pretend to tell me that"—and he shot a cunning glance at her from under his half-dropped lids—"when this very morning you have ordered New Year's cakes, and to-morrow you mean to open the house and let in a rabble on me, enough to eat up the substance of a far richer man than I am?"

The tears filled Mrs. Endicott's eyes. "How can you talk so, Hiram, when you have always rejoiced in the good old custom of keeping open house on New Year's day? We never have forgotten our humble origin—how we began poor, and worked up to wealth. The friends of our obscure early life are many of them our friends still, and they come around us on this day, and I have heard you declare a hundred times that it made your heart glow and warm to bid them welcome. Then there is your brother Silas, and the children. How they do enjoy

being with us on New Year's day. You can't think how delightful it is to see you two old fellows like boys together, running each other on old times and joking about the frolics of your youth. And that little surprise is always sure to come, when you present Silas with the thousand-dollar draft as a nest-egg for the year. You haven't failed to do it for the last dozen Januarys, and yet it is a surprise all the same—a surprise that makes Silas choke up and get out his handkerchief—and you are just about as bad, you know you are, Hiram. You have thanked God for wealth many a time, because it gave you the means of helping Silas along. With his unworldliness and grand inventive genius, he could not put himself at the mill to grind out dollars and cents. Many's the time I've heard you say, 'Money must pay tribute to brains;' and more than one poor artist and seedy literary drudge has come in here on New Year's day, and gone out with his pocket warmer than it had felt the whole year through. You never took any credit for it, Hiram. No, no; you did it because it was the purest enjoyment of your life."

Mrs. Endicott grew tremulous, and her voice

thrilled as she paced to and fro on the carpet. Her husband had thrown himself back in his easy-chair, and sat listening impatiently, with one hand beating a tattoo on the table, while the deep red flush mounted to his forehead and a skeptical smile wreathed his lips.

"You've hit the nail on the head now," said he, springing up. "Do you imagine there is no bottom to my purse, that I can go on forever supporting crowds of hangers-on—old friends, as you call them, who come for the loaves and fishes, and would turn their back upon us if we were poor and leave us to starve or beg? There is my brother Silas—I don't want to speak against my own flesh and blood, but he always was a visionary dreamer. I knew it when we were boys together. * There isn't a practical hair in his head. I have boosted him up, and held him above water-mark, about as long as I mean to. There is no drag on a man like poor relations. I've just made up my mind to stop the whole thing, and rid myself of the entire crew, by closing the house to-morrow, and writing on the door in big letters, 'No admittance to parasites?' For you see, Rachel"—he came close to her, and whispered it out with a wild look—

“a new commandment has been given unto me : ‘Hiram Endicott, take care of Number One.’”

Mrs. Endicott released her wrist from the grip of his hot fingers, and turned away to hide her blinding tears. “So changed,” she murmured—“so strangely, sadly changed.”

At the moment a sweet, girl’s voice was singing snatches of “Robin Adair” in the passage, and a light step came tripping to the library door. It opened and admitted Grace Endicott, her bonny face all lit up with smiles. She was the feminine portrait of her sire, touched in with fair young tints. Her blooming countenance was crowned with a wreath of light tresses, and the pearly hue of her skin set off by a dress of dark Scotch plaid, and a band of scarlet ribbon tied about the purely molded throat.

“You dear, patient boy!” cried Grace, running up to her father and kissing him. “Ellen said you wanted to see me here in the library, and I suppose I’m to catch a good scolding for keeping you waiting. But Robert was just on the wing, and he had to say one last word. See, dear, he brought me this lovely bunch of violets. I know you will enjoy them, for you are one

of the few big men who are simple-hearted enough to love flowers for their own sake."

"Take them away," said Mr. Endicott gruffly, though he did wince a little. (He and Grace had always been like dear, familiar playmates.) "I don't want any thing that comes from that puppy, Robert Hawley."

"Why, papa!" exclaimed Grace, starting back in astonishment. "What has happened to make you speak so of Robert?"

"Don't excite your father, Grace," said Mrs. Endicott in a low tone, at the same time making signals of distress from behind his chair. "He isn't well to-day."

"Yes, I am well, too," cried Mr. Endicott, the flush deepening on his brow and his hands shaking violently. "I'm as sound as I ever was in my life; and I won't be dictated to, nor submit to petticoat government. I'll tell Grace plainly, and to her face, why I object to Robert Hawley. He is hanging round here expecting to marry her one of these days, and then I shall have to support him. To be sure, he talks about entering the firm this January; but it's all a sham. He means to drop down on me like a dead weight, when I have more than I can

carry already. You'll drive me to the poor-house yet."

He lowered his chin into his neck-cloth, and half muttered the words to himself.

Grace looked in utter, helpless bewilderment from one parent to the other.

"O, papa!"—she was almost sobbing now—"you must remember that you have for years loved and trusted Robert like a son. You took him into the store a poor boy, and recognized his worth and talent, as you always did recognize the worth and talent of those about you; and, when we grew fond of each other, you were glad, because you said your daughter should marry a true man, even if he had his way to make, rather than any body's money-bags or bank-account. And as for our living with you, papa, it was your own plan. You could not bear to be separated from your little Grace if she was a tease and a torment—your spoiled baby. You said the rooms wouldn't look quite so sunny if she was away."

"You can't work upon my feelings," replied Mr. Endicott, the words coming thick from his throat; "Robert Hawley shall have his walking-papers immediately."

"O, papa, you will make me cry; indeed you will!" The tears were raining down her cheeks now. "You never did make me cry in all my life before. Don't you remember, when I was a little thing, how I used to run to you if any body teased me, and there came a lump in my throat, to hide my head in your bosom, and how you would comfort me till it all went away?"

She tried to slip upon his knee and get her arm round his neck, but he pushed her back.

"There, there," said he, speaking more huskily still. "I suppose you want to coax something out of your old father—to cajole some money from his pocket with your arts."

"You are ill, you are very ill," sobbed Grace, trying more and more to clasp his neck and draw his head upon her bosom. But he wrenched away her hands, and then his jaw fell; there came a gurgle in his throat, and he dropped backward in a ghastly fit.

The muffled sound of men's footsteps carrying a heavy burden up the stairs had died away. Ellen was in the hall, with her apron to her eyes, shedding some genuine tears.

"Poor, dear master!" she choked out. "To

think it should have been appleplexy coming on, and the likes of me to get mift for his calling names. I might have known there was something gone wrong when he took me up so short about the coal, for himself never was the one to pinch on the housekapin'."

It was almost dusk of the brief winter day, and the solid blocks of city houses were soberly cut against an unbroken gray sky. The doctor's buggy stood in the street before Mr. Endicott's handsome residence, and now and then a large snow-flake fluttered down through the still air—grown warmer since noon—like a white rose-leaf dropped from the lax fingers of an angel.

The doctor stood in the reception-room, with his coat on and his hat in his hand. He was a big, masterful man, with a strong face, that looked out of a mass of dark hair. The perceptive fairly beetled over his brows, and his quick eyes were out on duty perpetually.

Poor Grace had clasped his arm, and was lifting her agitated, teary face to his:

"Dear doctor, do give us a little hope. Say that when he wakens those dreadful suspicions will be gone, and he will know us as we are."

"I believe he will, Gracie. He has had a

partial upsetting, probably from some business anxiety ; but this stroke may save his reason. At any rate, there will come a change before morning, and we will look forward to it as a change for the better. I shall get round here by midnight again. There, there, little girl, don't cry. It makes me feel deuced queer under my waistcoat ;" and the doctor's blunt fingers tenderly touched her cheek. "Go and comfort your mother," he added. "She needs it sadly ; and you must remember how much there is depending on you."

Grace stole back into the hushed and dimly-lighted sick-chamber. On the bed lay stretched Mr. Endicott, with a sinister flush still reddening his forehead, a full, congested look about the temples, and the breath coming painfully through the parched lips. Mrs. Endicott sat by the sufferer's head, and could not be induced to go away for a moment's rest. Robert Hawley was to spend the night in an adjoining room.

The two women took up their watch that New Year's Eve with a painful tension of the heart, not daring to let their bosoms throb too loud, or a tear plash downward, for fear of torturing the sick brain, for whose restoration they

were ever silently praying. There was nothing to do through the long hours of darkness, except now and then to shift the bag of ice upon the head, or to pour a spoonful of liquid down the unconscious throat.

Midnight came, and with it the doctor. His buggy-wheels made no sound, for a silent, beautiful snow-storm was padding the stones of the street. He just looked in upon the patient, and gave orders to be called if any change occurred. Every bone in him was tired. He stretched himself, undid his cravat, camped down on the sofa in the next room, and in two minutes was snoring hard, with an idiotic expression of countenance quite remarkable for a man who looked so shrewd when he was awake.

The fires of the Old Year were dying out under a fur of gray ashes, and the Snow Angel was making the world's page pure and clean for a new record. The distant horse-cars ran on rails of silence and mystery, and the tinkle of their bells came sweetened to fairy music through the medium of the storm. The touch of the snow was healing the plague-spots and sores of the great city. Over the abodes of

crime, and shame, and misery, was spread the sinless mantle of its virgin whiteness. The church-door grew holier than its wont. There was a new and heavenly consecration. Every sculptured niche blossomed with a cherub. Over the legend of the portal, "Enter my gates with praise," was inscribed another legend in feathery letters, mimicking the ferns of the forest, as if God's finger had written there, "Blessed are the pure in heart." So the great town was held by a silent leaguer, and the hours wore on toward the dawning of a new day.

As gently, as peaceably, was a change wrought on the face of Hiram Endicott. The angry red was soothed away from his brow, and there came instead an expression of almost childlike peace, where the white hairs lay scattered upon his temples. An emollient touch, as from some spirit hand, had coaxed the fever from his breath, and composed his features to their natural look of goodness and trust. Even so had a blessed oblivion almost covered the traces of those few past days of strange, hard, worldly hallucination, and left only his noble, generous-hearted record clear to memory.

They had watched the change with bated breath. The doctor saw the crisis pass favorably, and then went away to a dying man in the next street, leaving orders that nothing should be done to agitate the patient when he awoke. Grace moved to the window, and softly opened the curtains to let the young, pure day in through a mask of snow, that had hung rosewreaths about the casings and piled the sill to a downy pillow.

Mr. Endicott unclosed his eyes with the contented gaze of an infant, and they rested on the snow, then wandered weakly to the face of his daughter.

"Why, my child, you still up? How pale and worn you look!"

"You have been very, very sick, dear papa. I have watched with you all the night, and so has mamma. O! I cannot tell you how terribly anxious we have been, how thankful we are that you are better."

Mrs. Endicott bent over her husband and kissed him, but could not trust herself to speak.

"Have I been sick, Rachel? Well, perhaps I have. I was troubled with ugly dreams, full

of distrust and suspicion ; but they all slipped away. And, oddly enough, when I looked out and saw the snow I thought I was a boy again, chasing Old Sile through the drifts. We used to call him Old Sile because he was such a lumbering, slow coach. We little suspected how the world would honor him one day. I could trip him up or wrestle him down any time, but when it came to head-work he always floored me."

Mr. Endicott was maundering on gently with his old memories, when there came through the soft storm, under the window, the shrill cry of a childish voice.

"What is that?" inquired the sick man.

"The little carrier-boy, papa," answered Grace. "He is crying his New Year's Address. Don't you know this is New Year's morning? O! I wish you could see the brave little fellow, all powdered with snow, his eyes dancing and cheeks glowing like two great roses."

"Run and stop the lad, somebody, and buy a copy, half-a-dozen copies, of his paper. It would do me good to pat the rascal on his curly pate. New Year's morning?" he added, musingly. "It is very odd I should have forgotten it was

New Year's morning. Yes, I must have been sick ; I see it now. But, Rachel, I hope you have made preparations to receive the old friends just the same."

"Yes, Hiram, if you say so."

"Of course I say so. Let there be feasting up stairs and down. I want every beggar who calls at the door to fare royally to-day."

"But you are too weak yet to go down, dear."

"No matter if I am. I can content myself up here, if I know the rest are happy. Old Sile will come and sit by me, just as he used to when I was a little chap and had the scarlet fever. Nobody could fix the pillow as he could, and many a night he put me to sleep telling stories. I'll get him to tell those same stories over again ; for, I'll be bound, he remembers every one of them. There's one thing, Rachel, (after a little perplexed pause,) that troubles me. My mind is blurred, and I must have dreamed it ; but it appears to me as though I had had high words with Tim Bradshaw, the old charity collector. Of course it can't be so. I recollect now, the last time I saw him, I scarcely recognized him, because he was so seedy. He hasn't

called for his subscription, has he? I mean to double it this year. Now, can't you contrive to send for Tim to-day, and clothe him up in a good warm suit? It must be managed very delicately, for he is sensitive and proud, and I would not wound his feelings for the world."

Mrs. Endicott was too much affected to mind how she replied. Grace knelt down by the bedside in a little tearful flutter, and tenderly kissed his cheek. "Papa, dear, would you mind seeing Robert Hawley?"

"Mind seeing Bob Hawley? Of course not. He's the very man I want to see. You little goose, to ask such a question," and he pulled her ear playfully.

Grace slipped out of the room, and came back radiant, leading her lover by the hand.

"Hurrah, Bob!" cried the jolly old invalid, "the sight of you is good for sore eyes. Give us your hand, my boy."

Mr. Robert Hawley turned his back and coughed, rather conspicuously, two or three times. "Thank you, sir; thank you," said he as soon as he could command his voice.

"Don't go to thanking me, man, until you know what you are thanking me for. I have

waited until this morning before informing you that the articles of partnership are all made out, and you and Grace can fix the wedding-day between you. Mind, though, if you are not good to my little girl I shall be after you with a sharp stick. Now you are one of the family, I'm going to give you the laboring oar and lay by myself; I want time to get acquainted with my wife. We mean to do our courting over again; don't we, Rachel?" said he, feeling for the wedding-ring on the slender, fair hand which he held. "We don't intend to let the young folks monopolize all the love-making, do we, sweetheart?"

"By no means, dear husband; but promise me one thing to-day—promise me you will never get immersed in business again."

"I'll promise you any thing you ask, Rachel. Yes, I own I have been too much swayed by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. The loss of the Spaulding mortgage affected me a good deal. It was only a few thousands, a mere drop in the bucket compared with my whole fortune; but I know I used to lie awake nights thinking how easily my property could slip through my fingers. The Bible

speaks of riches hardening the heart ; and in another place it says, ‘ Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.’ I have had my hard, mercenary, worldly dreams, like other men ; but I have always wakened out of them, Rachel.”

“Thank God for the awakening that restores you to your better, nobler self,” cried the wife, her eyes swimming in glad tears ; and thank God for this happiest New Year of our lives !”

GRANDMA'S NEW KNITTING WORK.

“**T**ALK about cleanin’!” exclaimed Miss Axy; “you’re always so slick here a fly might slip up and break its back. You ought to see our house at hum—Brother Hiram’s—with four or five gre’t strappin’ boys, making a hurrah’s nest the biggest part o’ the time. I kalkerlate that would set you about wild—you folks, so used to quiet and order.”

Miss Axy had held her hand on the door-latch for ten minutes while saying the last word. Her last word was apt to contain the “heft” of her talk, like the postscript to a letter.

“I think I could stand the noise and litter of a little child,” replied Patience Pearsall, her face grown shady and wistful-looking, “even if I am particular. We wouldn’t grumble at the extra work it would make, would we, grandma?”

“Lauk, no!” cried grandma, a round, merry old lady, with all sorts of nice creases about her

chin. "A baby is just the neatest kind o' knittin' work. That's what I keep tellin' Patience," with a sly wink at Miss Axy, "and I wouldn't care if there was a dozen of 'em. I was used to a bouncin' big family when I was a gal, and I allus enjoyed it. We had gin'ral trainin' every day in the year at hum." The very recollection made grandma laugh, with a suppressed, inward rumble, that shook her all over, but did not materially alter the expression of her jovial face. "I should lose my high sperits," she continued, when her merriment would again let her speak, "if Patience wasn't so good to bear with all my old-time ways and notions."

"Fy, grandma!" cried Patience, "it's you that are good to me, and keep me always cheered up. Every body says," turning to Miss Axy, "that grandma's better company than half the young folks going. She's so spry and fresh in her feelings."

"Wal," replied Miss Axy, "I can't say I think either on ye objects of charity. Hiram's wife'll be mightily tickled with this mince pie, it comes so in the nick of time, because last baking-day she was too busy on the boys' new jackets to

cook any thing extra. I'll send back the plate and napkin by Joel in the morning, so good-night." And at last Miss Axy took her spare figure out of the doorway.

It was just at sunset of a March afternoon. A few violet clouds barred the windy red of the horizon.

Patience looked down the road, through the bare tree-branches, as she paused a moment while fastening the heavy wooden blinds that protected the sitting-room windows. The wasted, consumptive-looking piles of snow in corners of the door-yard, the yellowish, sodden grass about the edges of the peony-bed, the naked stems of lilac and snow-ball bushes, spreading out like fingers from the palm of a hand, she saw, and yet saw not.

"Nathan will be very late to-night," said she at last, as if unconsciously speaking her thoughts.

"Sakes alive!" returned grandma, from her warm nook by the fire "I guess he will. That piece of road over Pinkney Ridge is always a hard pull; and this time o' year, with the heft he'll have on, the horses ought by good rights, to walk every step o' the way."

"It's a cold, hungry ride," said Patience, putting fresh wood into the stove. "I'm so glad I've got that pot-pie saved for his supper. Something hearty relishes after a long day in the wind."

"Such things make men vally their homes," returned grandma, with an immense sense of comfort and snugness.

Patience stepped round, quiet, neat, deft, and purposeful. She was thinking of her husband's cheer, and it made the blood glow very warm about her heart. Every little chore was attended to ; the lantern was brought from the cellar-way and placed upon the table ; Nathan's old, easy leather pumps, trodden down smooth at the heel and marked about the toes with all the peculiarities of the owner's joints, were put under the stove-hearth, to toast through and through.

"It's a lucky thing we got tea out of the way early," remarked Patience, "for now we shall have a long evening in which to finish that magazine story."

"O ! sartin," returned grandma, "I'm no gre't hand for novils, but I'll be whipped if I wouldn't like to know how the herowine, Sylvie, or what-

ever her name is, comes out. She was in a peck o' trouble when last heard from."

Patience took a large kerosene lamp from off the "manteltree," as grandma called it, with chimney burnished as bright as crystal. Once lit, and its rays softened by a green paper shade, the snug room came out pleasantly. It was wainscoted and painted lead color up to the high small windows, curtained with old-fashioned dimity of the most spotless hue. The wooden chairs were originally stiff and formal. In some houses they would have been anxious-seats and stools of repentance; but Patience had contrived for them cushions, with here and there a touch of warm color, from some cast-off dress, had abridged their long legs, and put on what Nathan called pantalets. One slim, high-backed rocker there was, that resembled a confirmed old maid. It had a padded back, and always gave a certain snappish jerk in the rear when any one tried to sit down. Grandma's chair was of the kind called splint-bottomed. It had round, stiff arms, but, nevertheless, looked almost as merry and jovial as grandma herself. The bottom was covered with a medley of patch-work, made of what in old times was known as

full-cloth, and edged with a very antiquated style of worsted fringe.

Every thing was just as neat as wax where Patience Pearsall reigned. The rag-carpet, the braided rug of the same material before the fire, the ancient blue-and-white spread under the table—used as a crumb-cloth—the printed oil-cloth table-cover, the old clock in the corner, Nathan's file of "The Weekly Tribune" near at hand, the almanac, and a small shelf of books, all took on a kind of homely grace, from the nicety of her arrangement.

In the very sunniest window—where roses grew bold, and pushed in their pretty faces, when June came—stood a purple petunia, twining over a green wire frame; and one great robust fish geranium, just now putting out some scarlet bloom. This bit of verdure was the one poem of the room, which Patience Pearsall's gray eyes read o'er and o'er lovingly each day, as if every flower and bud were a word of exceeding sweetness.

In what was called Nathan's corner stood a generous chintz-covered lounge, stuffed with feathers; too wide to sit upon, but the most delicious snoozing-place in the world. When

Nathan took his Sunday-afternoon nap, with back and shoulders fitted accurately to the inequalities of the old lounge, he could look up and admire his row of presidents, hanging against the wall, in pine frames painted a funereal black. Most of these worthies appeared to be suffering from an acute attack of colic or tooth-ache, but this fact did not in the least disturb Nathan's enjoyment-of them as works of art.

Now, curled up on the cushion of the lounge, lay a fat, wheezy old yellow cat, that woke out of a doze every few minutes to sneeze, and lick with a long red tongue the remotest hillock of her hunched-up back.

I don't know how many times Dinah had sneezed, or how many times the old clock had struck with a shrewish, positive sound, as much as to say, "Contradict me, if you dare!" when there came three distinct raps on the square-room door. Most of the apartments in the farm-house that opened at all outward did so distinctly upon the weather, with the brief introduction of one or two wooden steps. Now, when this knock came upon the square-room door, which was mostly a closed orifice in winter

and early spring, as the generality of people found their way round to kitchen or sitting-room, both Patience and Grandma looked a little startled.

"It beats the old tinker!" said grandma. "What arrent can bring us a visitor at this time o' night?"

"Perhaps Rafe Bloodgett's boy is worse," remarked Patience, taking up the lamp to go and obey the summons.

"Luddy!" said grandma. "I guess Bloodgett's folks have run here enough for a week past to know which is the right door. I'll just hobble on after ye; for they say, in case of danger, two is better than one, even if one is a spavined old creature, a good deal stiffer in the joints than she was fifty year ago." Grandma chuckled merrily over her own infirmities, as if they were too ridiculous to be considered as any thing but jokes.

"Danger!" repeated Patience, catching at the word. "What possible danger can there be?" But, with an unpleasant vision of drunken stragglers and crazy men, she went back and took up the tongs. Accordingly, with grandma limping on behind, and the tongs held a little

in the folds of her dress, Patience opened the square-room door, that gave a discreet company creak, and then proceeded to unlock the outside portal. The unheard-of disturbance to which it was subjected brought some harsh, rasping groans ; but, after a number of stout pulls, the door flew open—on nothing !

Patience started back with a half scream. "Granter Grievous !" cried grandma, catching hold of her daughter's shoulder, "what's the matter ?"

Their frightened faces peered out into the mysterious emptiness. There were some spectral tree-branches, and a glimpse of the sober night-sky seen through them. Patience was about to shut the door in a hurry, and double lock it, when a small bundle, near a pile of unmelted snow that filled the shadiest angle of the little porch, attracted her notice.

"I see something," whispered Patience with white lips, "lying there near the steps."

"A man, did you say !" returned grandma.

"No, it aint large enough for that."

"Poke it, and see if it stirs."

The suggestion was a good one. Patience poked the bundle with the end of the tongs,

standing a good bit off, and not a little scared. The touch seemed to inspire her with courage, for she stooped down, before grandma hardly knew what she was about, and took the roll in her arms. Something inside began to kick and wriggle quite briskly.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Patience, "this feels like a nest of squirming kittens. But I'm bound now to see what it is."

Even before she finished speaking, a smothered cry from an infant's voice told the story.

"Land alive!" cried grandma, raising her hands into the air. "If somebody haint dropped a baby on our door-step!"

Patience, meanwhile, in a state of intense excitement, ran with her burden into the warm sitting-room; and, as fast as ten nervous fingers would allow, undid the wraps, assisted by the little prisoner's hands and feet, who evidently had an ardent desire to "scratch out."

"What are we a-comin' to! What are we a-comin' to!" grandma kept saying as she waved the lamp wildly about, quite unconscious that the chimney was smoking terribly.

"I guess we're comin' to a baby," returned Patience.

And sure enough, after a moment of fumbling, out popped the prettiest baby-face you ever saw. The large brown eyes blinked and filled with tears, the rose-bud lip was made up to cry. "It's no joke," thought baby, "to be almost suffocated, and then unceremoniously dropped on a cold door-step." But, seeing those kind faces bent above her, the little girl, with the wisdom of eight or ten months, sensibly changed her mind, and began to crow and laugh.

I wish I had time to tell you all grandma's merry, delighted exclamations; all the tender, confused thoughts that filled the mind of good Patience; and all that baby's charms. Of course, the child was examined curiously from head to foot. Such darling hands and feet, and such a beautiful baby form, is not seen every day. Its clothes were of the poorest, scantiest kind, though clean. "Why," said Patience, feeling down into the little white bosom under a faded calico slip, here's a note!" It ran thus:

"DEER LADY: I know your kind heart will dispond at onct to the apele i mak on behaf uv this orphin chile. She is without payrents,

alone on erth. Her name is Permilly. Her distraction is good, and nothing to blush for. If you offer a assilum to the fatherless, Gaud will reward you.

(Signed) A friend tu humanity.'

It was written on a greasy, rumped piece of paper, in a very scrawly hand. Patience scrutinized it closely, with certain misgivings of the heart, that resolved themselves into "What will Nathan say?" As for grandma, she was made. Her new knitting-work had come to town. She patticaked and trotted, crooned and talked baby-talk, as if the care of infants had been her steady business through life. There was nothing like it when the little stranger laughed and displayed her five "tooses."

Of course, she was fed twice as much bread and milk as was good for her; and, in proof of the same, went right off to sleep.

"Nathan will be coming along pretty soon," remarked Patience, as she hovered around, stealing a kiss now and then from grandma's lap. "Hadn't I better lay her down on my bed, and break the news gradually?"

Grandma saw the wisdom of this suggestion, so the little sleeping stranger was laid as snugly in its nest of blankets and quilts as a field-mouse in its pocket. The tucking-up process was just finished when there came the rumble of a lumber-wagon to the door, and Nathan's voice, calling, "Hullo, there! a light!" Patience pressed one more kiss on baby's cheek, and then hurried out to wait on Nathan.

It took him half an hour to unload and put out the horses. When he came into the sitting-room he did not say much at first. It wasn't his way. Grandma tried to be very lively and "chipper," as she said; but inside her dear old bosom was a fluttering heart. Nathan merely drew up a chair to the stove, and spread his large red hands over the heat. He was a tall man, tanned and freckled, with straight brown hair, almost the color of his neck.

Patience hurried round, setting out his supper of smoking pot-pie and other toothsome dishes, such as her skillful hands knew how to concoct. "Any news?" asked Nathan, hitching up to the table with the zest of a hungry man. Patience looked at grandma,

and grandma looked back at Patience. The baby's peaceful breathing could almost be heard through the open bed-room door.

"Nathan," said Patience, laying her hand on her husband's shoulder, "we've had a present."

"'S'pose Uncle Zeke's sent that barrel of russets he promised," remarked Nathan calmly, with his mouth very full of pot-pie.

"No; something better than that."

Nathan did not glance up in surprise, or say another word for some time. It was not his way. He kept methodically introducing to his mouth larger and larger fragments of pot-pie; and, when they began to diminish in size, simply raised his head and said, "Wal?"

"Come here, Nathan." His wife's voice was instinctively coaxing. "Bring the light." Nathan looked puzzled now, but he obeyed, and followed Patience into the bed-room. With tremulous fingers and a fast-beating heart she turned down one corner of the quilt. There, in its warm nest, the moist hair printing its rosy cheek, one little fist doubled up, the other hand decorously spread upon its breast, lay that most enchanting of all pictures to a loving woman's eyes—a sleeping baby.

"Isn't it lovely, Nathan?"

"I suppose so, but I aint much of a judge. Where in the dickens did it come from?"

"Now, don't look cross, Nathan," (Patience put her two hands on her husband's shoulders,) "when I tell you it was left at the door, about nine o'clock this very evening. Here is a note that came with it; and now you are as wise as I am."

Nathan took the note, and as he read his face darkened.

"It's a mean, pesky, low-lived, underhand trick!" he broke out at last. "I wont stand imposition—no, not by a jugful; and this looks plaguey like it. You ought not to have touched the child, when you found out what it was. But you let your feelin's run away with your judgment, I s'pose, as wimmin generally do!"

"O, Nathan! would you have had us leave the little creature out in the cold?"

"Its tramp of a mother was on the watch, I'll be bound. Not a mite o' danger of the child's suffering! You see how it would be if we were fools enough to keep the young one; she'd be coming back and claiming it, one of these days, to make us 'fork over.'"

There was nothing that touched Nathan in his tenderest part like the possibility of being forced to "fork over."

Patience could not speak; tears filled her eyes, and a choking sensation came up into her throat.

"I suppose you are right, Nathan," she faltered at last. "But I have longed and prayed for a baby ever since we lost that little one, you know, before it learned to breathe. It was a great disappointment. The coming of this little helpless stranger seemed precious and providential. She's a perfect beauty, when awake; and such a winning, good-natured darling! But I suppose I must make up my mind to send her away."

"Now don't be in a pucker," said Nathan, rather snappishly. "The child must stay here to-night, of course; and to-morrow we'll see what's best to be done."

It was Nathan's way to put off things; and, besides, it gave him a singular, all-overish sensation to see Patience cry.

That night the grown folks did not sleep as soundly as common. Nathan would have secretly rejoiced if the little foundling had set up

what he called a "yawp," to make the women sick of their bargain. But the darling slept as sweetly on her improvised bed as if she had been cradled in roses. Very early next morning, however, she was awake, crowing and laughing, with arms beating up and down, like the wings of a bird.

"Hunkey dory!" cried grandma as she sat dressing the new comer, near a window all glorified with sunlight. "This is the way you looked, Nate, when a little shaver. You was a spunky chap; but she's jest as mild as milk. Come and heft the child. She's solid, with plenty of spring to her; and I do think she takes an uncommon sight of notice for her age." Grandma, beaming all over, held out the little one toward her son.

"No, no, mother, I aint no hand to tend babies," replied Nathan, fighting shy. He could not trust himself if those little chubby hands got to patting his face and twining themselves in among his heart-strings.

"I always thought you took naturally to children," said grandma, looking up over her specs, a little damped.

"I aint in such a twitter about 'em as some

folks are," he replied, rather crossly. "They're troublesome, noisy little imps, any way you can fix it. Patience, it seems to me you're awfully behindhand with your breakfast. Get away from under foot, you blasted—" He almost kicked old Dinah over while he spoke.

At breakfast every body looked glum—quite contrary to the custom, which brought each face to the table wreathed with smiles. Nobody seemed to be quite at ease except the baby; and she, it is safe to say, was twice as happy as a basket of chips when Patience sat her down upon the carpet, and gave her for playthings some spools strung upon a cord, and the biscuit-cutter.

Nathan savagely hoped that she would commit some unpardonable offense, and make herself a nuisance; but the little creature's good-nature was imperturbable. There she sat, blubbering, sputtering in a jolly way to herself, rattling the string of empty spools, and stretching out her plump legs on the carpet.

Grandma's high spirits were not quite proof against the cloud that hung over Nathan like a thunder-squall, and dissolved to tender April showers in Patience's face. When Nathan was

mentally disturbed, or had a "tough trade" to think over, he generally whittled a good deal into the kitchen wood-box. There he was now, with head down, letting out some tall links on an ash-splinter, when Patience came, and, laying her hand gently on his arm, said, with as much composure as she could command :

"Nathan, have you decided what's to be done with the child?"

"'Taint no use to get into a stew," replied he, with a good deal of impatience. "You can keep her, on a pinch, for a day or two, can't ye?"

"Yes ; only every hour she is with me will make it the harder to put her away."

"Wal, then," said Nathan, not noticing the end of her remark, "wait till I git ready to go to Tuttle's, after grass-seed. Tuttle's is on the way to the poor-house, and it will save me a journey a purpose. I swow!" he added, as an excuse for his hardness, "I wont be imposed upon, nohow."

Patience turned away with troubled face, and went vigorously to work on some little frocks and other garments, to supply the baby's most pressing needs, for it was destitute of a single change of clothing. She was glad of any occu-

pation for her fingers, to deaden the dull ache in her heart ; for hour by hour the child crept closer, and made a warmer nest in her affections.

The days of a week slipped by. Grandma's high spirits seemed less and less effective in lifting the cloud that hung over the little household. Nathan whittled a great deal, and grew cross and growlish to such a degree that his old mother looked at him more than once with tears in her eyes, wondering at the change that had taken place in her easy, kind-hearted boy—for boy he still was to her. Only the baby seemed to have a thoroughly good, jolly time, with her playthings and Dinah, whose tail had now become quite used to the liberties of baby's plump hands.

One bright, pleasant morning, when the lilac buds were beginning to pout a little, Nathan harnessed old Maje to the one-horse wagon, drove round to the door, got out slowly, hitched the horse, and came in with a set, hard look upon his face.

"I'm going to 'Tuttle's, Patience. You'd better git yourn and the child's traps on, and go along as far as the poor-house. 'Taint no

use spinning out things much longer ; and I'll be blamed if I'll put up with imposition."

Patience broke right down, and sobbed hard into her apron. Grandma, after telling Nathan the same as that she considered him a heartless brute, flying in the face of Providence, got up and hobbled out of the room. The baby, sitting on the carpet, knit her pretty brows, and looked up to see what the rumpus was, and if she might be expected to cry. But Patience never dreamed of resisting Nathan's will. She arose to go and dress the child. There sat her husband, coolly tilted back in the chair, a whip in his hand, and a soft hat pulled doggedly over his eyes. He tried to whistle ; but down deep in his heart there arose a strong suspicion that he was an unmitigated scamp, and deserved horse-whipping.

"You must hold the child while I go and get ready," said Patience, coming back, with her eyes very red, and baby resplendent in a pink calico frock, her rosy cheeks shining with soap and water, and her moist light hair quirked into all sorts of cunning rings.

"Can't she sit on the floor ?" asked Nathan,

"No, she'll soil her dress. I want her to go away from me looking clean and neat." Patience averted her face; but, without further ado, deposited the baby on Nathan's knee, and laid the pretty cloak and cap she had made it on a chair close at hand.

Nathan did not fancy this fix at all; but he could not refuse to crook his arm round the little creature and keep her from tumbling off. The very touch warmed and softened his heart. He whistled louder than ever, and gazed studiously out of the window. Baby did not mind his cold looks a bit. Girl babies rather fancy men; they have such jolly good pockets and an endless succession of buttons.

Accordingly, the little child's hand traveled up and down Nathan's vest to his watch-cord, where it began tugging stoutly to draw out his great silver watch, that thumped away inside like the piston of a steam-engine. "Goo-goo-goo!" said baby; "what an obstinate turnip this is!" She breathed very hard, but gave it up at last for a bad job. Nathan felt more and more like a scamp every minute; so, half mechanically, he turned, took up the little cap where it lay, and twirled it on his big, red fist.

It was of white merino, with a border of soft baby-lace quilled inside.

Our enterprising infant was not to be daunted by man's obstinacy. She stretched up her short arm and felt of Nathan's chin, pulled stoutly at his gingham necktie, and undid the bow, with a note of triumph. Then she coaxed his face with all sorts of persuasive pats and touches, until the man's heart, as Nathan expressed it, "knocked under" to baby eloquence.

Patience stayed away a long time. Though plain and simple in her dress, this day she seemed to have a vast deal of fixing and prinking up to do. When she came back into the room, Nathan jumped up in a hurry.

"Take this child," said he. "Old Maje is kicking like all possessed. I must run and see what ails the blasted critter!"

Patience glanced out of the window, in some astonishment to see Maje standing stock still. In fact, he was too old and steady-going to do any thing else. Her surprise was far greater, however, when she beheld Nathan jump into the wagon, and drive down the road at a smart trot. He was gone two hours; and when he came back his face looked kinder and happier

than it had for some time. In the back of the wagon there was a cradle and a high chair. That night he rather sheepishly produced from the depths of his pocket a rattle, an India-rubber ring, and "Mother Goose's Melodies."

Now the geranium is all aflame with scarlet blossoms ; and any sunny day, as you drive past, you may see Dinah purring in the window-seat, and grandma near at hand, holding her new knitting work. It laughs, crows, and jumps a great deal, and takes all sorts of liberties with grandma's specs and cap-strings. Every day it grows more and more of a treasure to the household, and would be in a fair way of getting spoiled, if the Lord had not given it a lovely disposition.

OUT OF THE WILDERNESS.

IT was late Saturday afternoon—a mild, winter afternoon, when night comes without notice or warning. Two women stood at the parsonage door. They were kissing each other good-bye.

The one was far past middle life, although her face did not indicate age except by its deep serenity. It was placid and calm, and bore impressed upon it the quiet spirit of the Quakers ; and although she did not belong to that sect, her dress partook somewhat of their prim simplicity. It was of drab stuff that fell in straight folds to her feet. Over her shoulders she wore an old-fashioned silk handkerchief of the same hue, showing just one touch of worldly conformity by a blue border. This was folded neatly across her bosom and pinned under the arms. The silvery hair was brushed as smooth as satin away from her pure forehead, beneath a cap of

lace. A large apron of white linen, and a bunch of keys dangling at her side, completed her costume.

Quite a decided contrast to the pale, saintly old woman did her companion, a young girl of eighteen, or thereabouts, present. She was short, with thick, curly hair, red cheeks, and sparkling dark eyes. Her dress was arranged with many a little touch of coquetry and an eye for warm, bright color. It was according to the fashion of the time, and consisted of a scarlet short cloak worn jauntily over the shoulder, a black jockey-hat with a drooping feather, a gray petticoat quilted in the finest "herrin'bone," beneath which peeped a well-turned ankle and pretty little foot, encased in a comfortable yarn stocking of home manufacture, and the trimmest of low-quartered shoes adorned with silver buckles.

The pair was admirably relieved by the low light from the setting sun, which cast a ruddy good-night over the door-yard evergreens and a stretch of snowy road, while the village spire and the smoky belt of naked trees along the frozen river were held in the purple shadow of the hill.

"You will try, dear child, will you not?"

said the elder woman, laying her hand kindly on the girl's shoulder, "not to wound Abner's good heart again by any of your foolish little coquetries?"

"I will do all I can to please him," replied Dolly Fraser, with a bewitching pout; "at least every thing in reason." Dolly was the rich Squire's daughter, and she had a pretty petulance of her own. "But men are too exacting. They want to clip a girl's wings the moment she has promised them. There is time enough for that, I am sure, when one is well married. I never do any thing that Abner need complain of. I should not get jealous if he smiled on half the girls in the village."

"You do not get jealous of Abner, Dolly, because you know he is as faithful to you as the needle to the pole; but I am afraid, if all I hear is true, that you are a sad little flirt."

"No, no, dear Mistress Fairchilds; but a girl, if she has a tongue in her head, must speak a civil word, now and then, at the husking-parties and the quilting-bees, to somebody besides her own sweetheart; and I own that I have loved to tease Abner, though I would not give his old shoes for all the fine city fops in

the world. You know I am a motherless girl, and there is nobody to tell me when I go wrong except I come to you." There was a softening of her voice and face, and she put up her arms to embrace the old woman's neck. "I shall not soon forget the story of your poor son George. It will make me very careful how I again trifle with a good man's feelings."

"There spoke a noble-hearted girl!" exclaimed the dame with fervor. "It was hard to tell; but I told you my poor boy's story, because I knew it would make you more considerate of the true heart which has laid itself confidingly in your hand. There never was a young man who promised better than our George; but he staked his all on the love of a woman, and he believed she played fast and loose with him, and then flung him away to marry a rich rival. I don't judge her, child. No, no; God forbid!" The old mother's voice broke, and then went on. "He was proud and sensitive, and could not hold up his head among his old comrades. It seemed to kill the good in him; and he took to bad ways, as men do, and wandered off from us out into the world—into the wilderness, child—twenty years

ago. Twenty years ago," she repeated, with the big tears rolling down her cheeks, "and yet it seems but yesterday since he was a baby, lying here upon my bosom."

"Dear dame," said Dolly, her own lips quivering with emotion, "don't despair. He may come back yet, and be a great comfort to you."

"I never lose sight of that, Dolly. It seems to me he must have heard my heart calling out after him all these long years. I have kept every thing just as it was, that he might find the old place unchanged, and I lie awake nights listening for his footsteps; for he will come before he dies."

There were more words, another embrace, and then Dolly went tripping away on the packed snow-path, as the sunset still lingered low down in the west.

Dame Fairchilds stood and looked after her with a blended expression of tenderness and something that lay deeper in her own heart. Then she shut the outside door, opening on the passage of the living-room, also the kitchen in those days. There all the life and activity of the house centered, while the "keeping-room"

remained a closed receptacle of primness and gentility.

The living-room of the parsonage was long and low, with the whitest of sanded floors, and the most generous of hearth-stones. There was an open dresser, with a fine array of bright pewter in plates and tankards. The tea-table, with its quaint "company" silver and china, got out for Dolly's benefit, made but an island in the oceanic bigness of the apartment.

One corner was occupied by a spinning-wheel, and a little flax-wheel, which stood dutifully by, like a child at its mother's knee. Along the wall hung numerous strings of drying apples and pumpkins, and braided scallops of pop-corn and clusters of golden seed-corn. The splint-bottomed, stuffed-backed rockers were cushioned with gay patch-work. The bow-topped chairs were set in rows against the wall. In the heavy door, crossed with iron clamps, was a hole, fitted with a wooden flap, for the convenience of the great lazy cat. The leathern bellows hung against the chimney jam, like a household *lar* holding the good gift of fire in its bosom.

In the little compartment made by the jutting

shoulder of the huge chimney-stack stood a high four-poster, piled with the softest feathers, and covered by a blue and white counterpane, the coarse linen sheets and pillow-slips, white as drifted snow, smelling of lavender. Before it lay a braided rug, and at its head, through the fringes of the dimity curtain, looked a pleasant window, that showed the well-sweep, and a bit of orchard with the knotted branches of apple-trees. There was an antique stand with claw-feet near by, supporting the family Bible, and, what seemed strange in that abode of old people, a baby's high-chair and a little desk.

Old Dorothy, the parsonage "help," often wondered grimly why these things were not packed off up garret to keep company with the little wooden cradle that had not, according to her reckoning, felt the touch of a mother's foot nigh on to forty years. It would be better for the mistress, she thought, and better for her.

Dorothy was a tall spinster, with a wooden cast of countenance, which gave no trace of the emotions of her soul. She owned but a few spears of iron-gray hair, which were twisted in so tight a wad on the top of her head they

appeared to give the damsel's eyes a wide-open, winkless expression. Dorothy's coarse-stuff petticoat and short gown, the string of gold beads about her neck, and the heavy pegged shoes that stood away from her shrunken ankles, seemed to form a bristling hedge against mankind.

Dorothy had the fortune to be hard of hearing. This peculiarity cut her off from the vain world, and left her in peace to herself.

She was moving about now with a slow, angular motion, scraping the green gages from the best glass dish back into the jar, and putting the tea things away in cupboard and pantry. Once in a while she coughed, with a sound like the rattling of dried peas in the pod, and then the back of her bony hand went up to her lips, as if she would even reduce her cough, if possible, to a secretive, undemonstrative act.

"Don't mind about the chores, Dorothy." Dame Fairchilds went close to her and screamed into the maid's good ear. "That cold is teasing. You had better take an herb sweat to-night, and get it out of your bones."

"Cold," muttered Dorothy; "yes, yes, Old

Kettle Corner"—and she glanced out of the window—"looks ugly. There'll be a change of some kind afore mornin'."

"You had better take a good dose of camomile and soak your feet," screeched the dame.

"Do ye mean them stains in the best tablecloth? Well, I did soak 'em," responded Dorothy grimly. "But currant-stains don't stir easy. They has a knack of griming in."

Dorothy clattered the dishes she was washing out of a cloud of soapy steam, and the good dame gave up with a sigh.

Meantime Dolly Fraser went tripping down the meadow path that led "cross lots" to the village. The snow crackled under her tidy shoes with a sound like elfin laughter, and the hectic in the west dwindled to one faint streak of rose-red. She had to pass the country graveyard, with its leaning head-stones, and the very corner where her mother's stately monument gleamed out white and tall. Dolly was no coward. She did not even quicken her pace, although she was slightly startled as the slouching form of a man got over the stile into the highway upon which she had now emerged. A slit-eared dog followed close behind him.

The man held a fiddle-case under his ragged elbow, and enough pallid daylight remained to show the girl he was a common tramp, not always a pleasant companion to meet in a lonely spot.

The man's countenance was partly hidden under the droop of his tattered hat, but Dolly could see that it was gaunt and unshaven, marked by the livid spots of a tippler. She had no time to wonder what this old cove and his miserable lean dog had been doing in the burying-ground, when the man spoke respectfully enough, and in a tone she had hardly thought him likely to use.

"It's likely, miss, you know the country folks hereabouts?"

"Indeed I do!" replied Dolly, with that easy affability which made her a general favorite, "for I was born and bred in the village yonder; but you, I take it, are a stranger in these parts."

"In a way, yes, and in a way, no. Them that follows my trade are allus strangers, and allus at home."

Dolly looked at him, but she did not see the expression which shot out of his rheumy eyes.

"You were thinking, perhaps, of a night's lodging and shelter from the cold," said the young girl kindly. "Maybe you are hungry?"

The man nodded.

"Go there, where you see that chimney-stack with the smoke rising above the trees. That is the parsonage. They never refuse help to any body at that door."

"But the women folks," muttered the man in a strange, husky, shaking voice. - "Me and my dog aint favorites with them. They threaten to take the broom-stick to us sometimes."

"Never fear," responded Dolly. "Dame Fairchilds will be as kind to you as your own mother. No tenderer heart beats in the breast of woman than hers is; and besides, a son of her own, years ago, quitted home and never was heard of from that day to this. For his sake, I think her heart yearns toward all poor wanderers."

The man shook like a leaf, his blotched face grew ghastly, and the drops of perspiration started on his forehead, but Dolly's tongue went tripping along.

"I dare say, now, you can play a batch of jigs and dancing tunes, and the young folks of the

village would be glad to hire you for our merry-makings. The boys are generous, and know how to pay the piper. Come to me if you need help. I am Dolly Fraser. My father is Squire Fraser, down there in the village. Any body can show you where we live."

She waved a good-bye to him, and went tripping away; but the man stiffened himself starkly against the post-and-rider fence by the roadside, with his red eyes suddenly redeemed from their watery vagueness by a gleam of fire. An imprecation swelled in his throat. Her child, the child of the woman who had cursed him, with the same voice and smile living in her to curse another man—a better man perhaps.

His chin went down into the miserable rags about his neck, his knees bent, his arms contracted with a look of utter misery. The livid spots came out whiter upon his face, and the wind, which was growing colder, took up his ragged gray locks and blew them about. The dog sat upon his haunches on the snow, and looked up into the man's countenance with wistful eyes.

Meantime Dolly was unlatching the gate of the Squire's warm, lighted mansion. Somehow

the picture of that miserable tramp shuffling over the burying-ground wall and the dame's story of her lost son got blended together in Dolly's mind, and made her feel tenderly toward Abner Strong. She hoped he would come to-night. She meant to be very kind to him, and make him forget some things which he was only too apt to remember. Dolly did not know that the snow had been carefully scraped away from the inscription upon her mother's headstone, and that there were prints of a man's feet and the leaf-pattern of a dog's paws marking the ground about her grave.

Dorothy, candle in hand, had mounted the kitchen stairs to her virgin apartment, as frosty as her own maiden heart. She sneezed twice on her way up, as was her unalterable custom, with the motion of a folding-machine, which nearly bent her double and showed her calfless legs in their long blue-yarn stockings gartered above the knee.

The dame was alone down stairs. She set the jug of emptyings upon the jam, stepped softly across the floor to save the creak of her shoes, and opened the buttery door. There was a cold joint upon the shelf, and an array of flaky

mince-pies which were to furnish forth the Sunday dinner. Her eyes strayed to the pans of golden cream-crust milk, and the snowy loaves in the big bread-tray. "The Lord's mercies abound," thought she, as she stepped out again, "and I would love to think my superfluity takes not from any empty mouth."

She paused again on the hearth-stone, its polished fire-dogs and wide-armed settle and the swinging crane all ruddy from the progress of the flame, which, eating into a tough hickory back-log, feathered all the edges with palpitating gray ashes. Dame Fairchilds held the big shovel in her hand, and was about to bury the good household genius under a heap of ashes.

"No," said she to herself, with a start out of a little reverie, "it shall burn itself away to-night. He might come. Who knows?" She put the hope by—it was too faint to entertain. "I will let the fire burn at any rate, and the gleam from the windows may show some poor benighted creature the road to a sheltering roof. It is growing cold"—as the wind crooned down the chimney, and a silvery mist-like breath began spreading over the pane.

She went to the corner by the bed, and touched

the little high-chair and the desk with her pale old fingers, as if she were touching the face of a dead baby. The action had something religious about it. The key had half-turned in the lock of the desk. There, were the initials G. F. cut in big letters by a boy's jack-knife on the black painted cover. The dame snapped back the key. She could not trust herself quite in sight of the school-books and the lad's stray mittens, and the checker-board with the leather men he had cut.

"I'll step softly," said she to herself, "so as not to disturb Chester. There, now," going to the outside, "the cat can't lift the latch, but any poor benighted creature could seek an asylum from the cold. We are such simple, plain folks, nobody will harm us. I am sure the world would be better if human beings trusted each other more. It can't be that much wickedness is ever deliberately planned."

It was not yet nine by the great clock in the kitchen corner, which ticked so loudly that each separate tick made a splash in the silence. Softly the good woman tiptoed along a narrow passage-way and tapped at the study-door.

"Come in, Eunice; why do you stop to

knock?" said the white-haired pastor, getting up from his table to meet her, and taking her hand in his, gallantly.

The pastor was ruddier and fresher than the dame. There was a child-like sparkle in his blue eyes. His locks were white and airy, as if tossed in a breezy romp, and his motions were quick and full of spirit. He wore a cue, in accordance with the fashion of the time, and was dressed in a suit of dark tea-colored short-clothes, buckled with polished steel.

"I stayed away, Chester, because I feared your sermon would not get on quite so well if I came in, and you know it is Saturday night. The Bible exhorts us wives to be helpmeets not hinderances and stumbling-stones." This was said half-playfully.

"You are burdened with an over-nice conscience, Eunice. My sermon would have a sweeter savor of charity if you always sat by my side while I wrote."

"No, my husband; you are too impulsive. Don't you remember how we tried it once, and I brought my sewing and sat here by your elbow, and no work was done? We chirped and chatted the whole day long like two foolish

old robins. I wonder we should have so much to say to each other after living together close on to fifty years."

"It is because we never get fully acquainted, Eunice. How long does it take to learn the height and depth, length and breadth, of one human soul! Every day I see some new measure of tenderness in you, and I wonder if God has put such natures in all women."

"Tut, tut," said the dame, just as a mother might reprove her favorite child for a fault of temperament, her cheek reddening meanwhile; "you forget that all our natures are depraved."

"It is hard to remember it always, Eunice. I can more easily keep in view the breadth of God's saving love. I am an old man now, and, perhaps, growing childish, but I seek the sunlight rather than the shade. I rest on what I am sure of, more than on inscrutable mysteries. I must leave the hard nuts of theology for younger and stronger teeth than mine to crack, and bask in the infinite goodness, the unfailing compassion, of my Saviour."

"Be careful that you do not lull sinners to sleep," said the dame, pulling the rein with a smart little jerk to bring the good parson back

on the theological course, just where she thought he ought to be. "God is just as well as merciful. He will not always stay his wrath. There is Squire Fraser, who holds by you, and though I fain would not think ill, it must be he is a hard man."

"Does his holding by me prove him to be a hard man, Eunice?" asked the parson with a half-sad, half-tender smile wreathing his lips.

"No, God forbid!" said the dame hastily, caught in her own net. "I hope it proves there is a spark of spiritual life in the man's soul that may yet be touched by a coal from off the altar. How strange," she sighed, after a moment's pause, "to see that child, Dolly, coming here to me with her mother's face, and the very tones of her voice! She hurts my eyes and the very heart in my bosom, and yet I cannot put her by if I would. She will cling to me. I talked to her gravely to day about trifling with Abner Strong, and she promised to amend. Something prompted me to tell her the story of my poor boy. *She* is dead now, and it can do no harm, and the child might be led to think unwittingly—her own mother might furnish a warning."

"That poor woman's punishment was bitter," sighed the parson. "She lived a loveless life, and now, as I look across the fields to her grand monument rising above the more humble stones, my heart is full of compassion. I kept the memory of George locked up in one corner of my mind until it grew damp and moldy. Then I resolved to open it to God's light and air. The boy could get away from you and me beyond the shelter of the old roof-tree, but he could not get away from infinite mercy. The promises abide forever, and I have laid hold of them."

"Boy," repeated the dame, as if she had hardly heard the last words. "He was forty-one last May. Think what a tall, bearded man he must be, Chester; but I should surely know his eyes. They always smiled when he was soberest. Folks say that ministers' sons are apt to be wild and go astray. Were we ever harsh with little George? Was the life of this house too grave and formal for a young creature's tastes and feelings? Did we try to feed him the meat of religion, forgetting that milk is for babes?"

"Perhaps," answered the minister, with a

touch of sadness, "I can look back now to the time when George, a little shaver, wanted to learn music, and I opposed it, because it seemed a vain thing for one set apart and fore-ordained, as it were, to the high calling of God. I have had my worldly ambitions, Eunice, and one was to see George in my place down there in the old meeting-house."

"The human heart is deceitful," said the dame; "but if we had had the foreknowledge and the clear eyes of angels, we could not have loved our boy more than we did."

The study-candle was put out before the great clock struck ten, a preposterously late hour in the parsonage. No shutters barred away the rich, subdued gleam of the moldering back-log from any passer-by on the road.

Half an hour later, when the inmates were sunk in slumber, a man, who had skulked behind a hay-rick since dark, stole into the orchard, followed by the light patter of a dog's feet. It was growing visibly colder, and the man blew upon his fingers. There was a little foot-path twisting about through the orchard down to a cow-pasture. The snow upon the ground, and some beams from a gibbous moon streaming

through a light haze, showed where the villagers crossed that way in winter, and marked the same track that in summer-time ran trickling through high grasses, and fringes of daisies and buttercups, mottled by leaf-shadows and the swift wings of birds.

This was the same slouching, degraded figure Dolly had seen creep over the burying-ground wall. As the man shambled along, stopping now and then when a pain caught him in the side, it seemed to him as though his torn and tattered boots, holding a pair of frost-bitten feet, were put into the prints of a boy's feet, who had once bounded along that path, and shouted far up among the gnarled boughs as he gathered a capful of Newtown pippins and "seek-no-further."

His heart beat with a heavy, dull thud that filled his ears. The confusion of his mind was horrible. He seemed to lose his identity. This miserable, abased life was only a hideous dream. He looked up at the darkened windows of the parsonage in a tremor that shook him like a strong ague. Within a few short rods a fond mother's heart was beating, and by hers rested the white head of the good old

father who had dandled him on his knee in babyhood. If he could only see what time had done for those aged faces, where the locks had silvered, and where bitter tears for the reprobate son had plowed furrows in their cheeks !

He meant to steal up until he could almost hear their tranquil, innocent breathing, and then to steal away again for ever. He would not curse the old folks with his tainted presence. It would be like a carrion-crow in a dove's nest. The thought of the orderly Christian home, with its regular hours and respectable, steady-going ways, turned him sick. He had been a vagabond too long to begin over again. Starvation in the highways and hedges was preferable. He thought of the long Sundays of his boyhood, which it had seemed to him would never come to an end, and wondered if he could live through one of them again. These were some of the man's thoughts as he slouched and shuffled along.

The old well stood in an angle of the wall. The ancient bucket was icy now, and glittering spikes depended from the smooth curb. The man clutched the slippery edge with his bare

hands. He was shaking worse than ever. He was not in drink. Not a drop had passed his lips that day. It would not do to go too openly about the village tavern. The old publican had a keen memory for faces. It must be the want of drink that was ailing him—perhaps the devils were getting hold of him.

He leaned over the well-side until he seemed to see reflected in the depths below the flushed face of a boy who had run panting from play, with the curly locks about his forehead moist with perspiration. No, that would not do. It was the innocence of the face that stabbed him, and he got away from the sight as quickly as he could, and went and braced himself against a tree. The power of independent self-support seemed gone from his shaking knees. He would not have chosen that buttonwood-tree if he could have helped it, for the boy George had scrambled up through its branches a hundred times. The "tremens" were hard after him now, but he would fight them and double on them and cheat them yet. A vague flickering wonder came into his mind as to how it would have been if he had never let a heartless woman play with and deceive him ; if he had been

converted and turned minister, as father wanted him to. One of those awful texts he had shuddered at when a boy came up to him: "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die."

Just over his head was the narrow casement of the chamber which had been his. Many a night he had swung himself down by the boughs of the old buttonwood to go to dances unknown to the old folks. Dorothy, old even then, was in the secret, but she clung to him like a true friend. A subdued light was shining out of the window, that opened upon the orchard. The bare thorny sticks of a cinnamon rose-bush clung to the casement. He remembered just how the old-fashioned fragrance smelled in June when the bush was crowded with leaves and buds, and a south wind blew in through the dimity curtain.

He crept up as well as he could, remembering just how the window was banked. He put his ragged knees into the crust of the snow—the print remained there for many days afterward—and breathed on the frost-work of the pane. It melted little by little. He helped to clear the space with his greasy cuff. The room looked solemn in the fire-light with great masses

of shifting shadow. A gleam stronger than the rest fell on the old parson's coat and broad-brimmed hat that hung against the wall, and on his staff. It made the man sob like a very child. He clung desperately to the sill, peering in with his gray, piteous face, until there came something like a rush of hot lava through his side, and he fell back upon the snow in a miserable heap.

When the poor old tramp came to, his dog was licking his face. There was a terrible heat and thirst in his stomach, but he was too weak to lower the bucket into the old well and draw it up again. There came upon him a distinct vision of the water-pail where it stood on the sink-shelf, cool and dripping, and just on what particular nail the dipper hung. He could feel for them in the dark.

If the door was on the latch, as it was sure to be, he would creep in and quench that fire inside of him, and then he would creep away and die by the roadside, if die he must. The old folks had grown happy and tranquil in the shadow. They should never know the worst. They should be left to think of him as well as they could, to believe that in some quarter of

the globe he was leading a respectable, clean life, or else had perished long ago.

Once upon his legs, he did not stumble or grope much in getting through the passage. A garment brushed his face, and he knew in the dark what it was. The very fiber of Dorothy's coarse linen work-apron seemed familiar to him. He pressed it to his hot eyes and forehead. Old Dorothy had been very kind to him. He used to track her floors and tease her with his tricks, but still she was very kind in her grim way.

Once in the old living-room, the shaking and the dazed feeling returned. There was the cellar-door, with its rough iron latch. He opened it just a crack to admit the spicy fragrance of the apple-bins and the cider-barrels. He had taken off his wretched boots now, and he knew just where the loose board in the floor was, and how to tread to avoid its creak.

The water-pail stood in the old spot. He drank long and deep of the home liquor, the pure beverage of his boyhood. Might it not wash away the stains from his soul, and drown the misery that had buried its fang so deep in his breast? As he stole along he felt of the

rough wall, the chair, the old clock, and the high chest of drawers. Stealthily he opened the door leading to the old couple's apartments, and listened for the breathing of the sleepers. He strained his ears—not a sound was to be heard. He dared not go nearer, and, like a shadow, he crept to the corner where the bed was. The dog had lain down on the hearthstone, and was warming his sharp bones by the expiring fire.

It was dark in the corner by the bed. The man's hand went groping about and touched the desk with the key in it. Instantly he knew whose it was, and why it was there, and the knowledge was almost too much for him. When he could, he opened the lid and felt of the old school-books. Mother had kept them, every one. Dear, doting mother! She always thought her headstrong boy perfection. He wanted to get down and kiss the prints of her feet on the worn boards. What a thing that would be for the old cove to tell his pals over a tavern spree!

His mind seemed to lose its relations of then and now. It must be he had just stumped the master in practice, (for he was quick at figures,)

and beat Ben Shorely in that famous race over Long Hill.

He went and knelt softly down by the stand where the big Bible lay. There was light enough to make them out, and it would be pleasant to look at the quaint old pictures once more. He knew them just as well as he knew the strings on his fiddle. The brown leaves opened of themselves at the Prodigal Son. There was the repentant youth clad in rags and fallen upon his father's neck. George Fairchild's heart gave a great cry; an inward cry that breaks, a dumb moan that can find no words of prayer, only "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" His head fell down upon the page; great slow tears began to soak into it and blister it. His iron-gray locks, ragged and unkempt, were scattered over the brass clasps and the worn leather edges.

He lay there until a curdling chill seized him and shook him into consciousness. There was the bed, soft, warm, and downy. He crept into it and drew the coverlids about his head. Down he sunk with a great sense of rest—rest and home at last after those long wet tramps in the snow and wild wind. His mother was particu-

lar about her sheets, but he was sick. Something was coming to him. Was it death?

He was in the leafy orchard, with white clouds skurrying away overhead. The clouds bent down and changed to rose and pearl; changed soft'ly to the faces of his old friends, and the world was sinking and fading out—fading out—fading out.

It was Sunday morning. They were up later in the parsonage on that morning than the others of the week, and old Dorothy's cold and bones'-ache had kept her in bed past her usual hour.

The first golden beam had picked the lock of night. It fell through the dimity curtain, and touched a man's face lying on the pillow. Was he sleeping? There was no pulsation of the heart. The arms lay lax and easy on the cover. The waxen fingers of death had smoothed away the blar and watery marks about the eyes, and composed the gray and sunken face upon an almost forgotten plan. It looked almost young, and almost innocent, and altogether tranquil.

Dorothy crept down stairs, and when she saw and knew all she fell upon his neck and

kissed him, and wept for once aloud. The dog howled dismally.

The old parents came ; and when the patient mother saw how it was with her boy, she took his head in her arms, and rocked back and forth and moaned and moaned. She had hoped for such a different coming home from this at last !

The old white-haired pastor knelt by the bedside.

“ Can we dare to find comfort for our poor boy’s soul ? ” sobbed the dame as she smoothed back, with unspeakable tenderness, the gray hair from his dead face.

“ Yes,” said the pastor, looking up with clear, shining eyes, “ all things are possible with God. His mercy endureth forever. Our child has been taken out of the wilderness ; who shall say God has not gathered him into his fold ? ”

BLUE MONDAY.

“**M**ALVINY, put that pail of butter under the seat, and be keerful about them eggs. I don’t want your father to know that we carry on this kind of dicker with the store. He’s a hard-working, peaceable man, and don’t make no trouble in the house; but he hasn’t any sort of idea what women-folks can want of money.”

Mrs. Folger was sticking her shell side-comb through the little curlicues in which she arranged her front hair and disposing a flowered shawl upon her ample shoulders. Malvina, her buxom daughter, stripped her plump, rosy arms free from foamy suds over the wash-tub.

“Are you going to take something to the minister’s, mother?”

“Well, I don’t know as I care about it. They got a rousing donation last fall, and it don’t do folks any good to be made cossets of. On

second thought, though, you may put in the tin bucket of buttermilk. Buttermilk saves short-nin', and if a woman is economical it's a great help in a family; but I mistrust that Miss Moseby aint no great shakes of a manager. Put it in, though; it will give me an excuse for calling, and I'll get round about dinner-time."

The week's wash was almost out at the farmhouse. Numerous white garments were blowing from the line in the dooryard, or lay spread upon the currant-bushes, or bleaching on the grass. There were four strong, hardy women to put things through there, and ten o'clock generally saw the big wash disposed of.

Mrs. Folger was going to drive old Dolly to the village. She had been tackled to the one-horse wagon, and her long-legged colt was to follow on behind. The wooden seat of the vehicle was covered with a buffalo-robe; and Mrs. Folger, who was no feather be it known, (such capable, hard, energetic women seldom are feathers,) mounted in by the aid of a kitchen-chair. She sat firmly in the middle of the seat, and grasped the lines with professional accuracy. Mrs. Folger was not the woman to twitch the reins or "cluck" at a horse. It is safe to

say that she hated all manner of female infirmities. Old Dolly was rubbing the head of her mouse-colored colt, and whispering to her cosily, when they turned out toward the gate, scattering a brood of soft, fluffy little chickens, that ran off toward the coop with wings wide-spread. All of a sudden the matron checked up with a vigorous "whoa!"

"Sabina," cried she, "bring out that bag of rags. Smith & Stearns are paying six cents a pound, and I had like to have gone off and forgot them. You and Ruth had better fold down the clothes after dinner, and begin to iron," she added, as a sunburnt lass ran out bare-headed, and deposited a huge bag of some checked linen stuff in the back of the wagon. "You needn't look for me until milking-time. I've got a word or two to say to the minister. Yesterday's sermon didn't set well. There, now, give me a switch. Old Dolly will poke along like Time in the primer, unless I have something to touch her up with now and then."

Sabina pulled a whip out of the wood-pile, and in a minute more old Dolly felt a swinging blow over the haunches, which caused her to break into a sprightly trot. Every thing jounced and

jolted up and down in the wagon, and the long-legged colt loped on behind. The girls stood at the door, head over head, to watch the departure. They felt a certain pride in what you may call their mother's "whewgee."

"I tell you what," said Ruth, "mother knows how to get up the steam. I don't wonder father complains that women-folks are hard on horses."

Little Ella Moseby had been sick all night. Her small hands felt burning hot to the touch, and her tongue was parched with fever. Mrs. Moseby was a very anxious mother—too anxious Sister Folger had broadly hinted many a time. It doesn't do to make idols of our children. She never had made idols of hers. According to her theory, in such cases the Lord generally takes them out of the world, as a punishment to the parents. Timid little Mrs. Moseby never heard this doctrine aired without a cold, creeping chill, and a terrible sinking of the heart ; still her mother-nature yearned over her little brood, rejoiced when they rejoiced, and wept when they suffered.

She was a slender, thin-chested woman, with a dry, troublesome hack, which nobody thought much about, except her husband. Half the

night she was up and down with her sick child ; and the year-old baby, awakened by the unusual stir, cried lustily, and was hushed to sleep again in the minister's arms as he paced the floor during the small hours.

At last, toward morning, the little lamp which gleamed from the parsonage window was put out. The sick child, the weary parents, and the cross baby slept. They slept on until long after daylight ; and when the minister opened his eyes the clock was on the stroke of seven.

He jumped up hastily, and, putting on his most needful garments without noise, went to kindle a fire in the kitchen stove, and fill the tea-kettle at the well. It was a sweet June morning, with a light breeze turning up the leaves of the trees, with birds singing, and little huddles of white clouds nestling together along the horizon's rim. The minister stood with bared brow uplifted to the light and fragrance, and a peace entered his breast which passeth understanding.

He dreaded to go and wake his wife. She was lying back upon the pillow with the relaxed air of feebleness, and her face was so pale and sunken it seemed as though the cable of her life

might easily pay out into the deep, still waters of eternity. The little girl lay in the crib, her cheeks flaming crimson, and the fevered breath coming painfully through the baked lips.

"Margaret," said the minister, tenderly stooping down and laying his hand on her forehead, where the blue veins showed through the delicate skin.

Mrs. Moseby woke with a start. "How I have overslept myself!" she exclaimed. "I was dreaming about Ella," and her eyes anxiously sought the crib.

Willie, the stout little six-year-old, was up now, trying to dress himself. One shoe was on, and he had slipped into his trowsers the wrong way, and was tugging hard at the buttons.

"Had we better send for Dr. Bolus?" inquired Mrs. Moseby, as she came out, with her thoughts full of the sick child, and stood by her husband's side.

"My opinion is against it, Margaret. Dr. Bolus believes in the old six-horse-power style of practice, and I can't bear the idea of pouring those nauseous drugs down the children's throats. You get breakfast, dear; I meantime

will put Ella into a cold-water pack. I shouldn't be at all surprised if it relieved her in less than two hours."

"But, if it should prove any thing serious, wont the people think it very strange that we have not employed a physician? Besides, you know Dr. Bolus is one of our most influential men, although he isn't a professor."

"I can't help that, Margaret," retorted the minister with a degree of spirit. "We belong to the people, in a certain way—all our acts have to be scrutinized; but our children belong to us. God has put them in our arms, and told us to nurture them according to the best light we possess. Yes, Margaret, our children belong to us, under God."

Mrs. Moseby went about breakfast with a heavy heart. She was not the one to throw off trouble. Her power of resistance was feeble, and life always seemed to be demanding some great effort she hardly knew how to make. Breakfast in the parsonage was no great matter, to be sure. They had left off tea and coffee there, except on extra occasions, long ago. This was one of the extra occasions; and a very small drawing was put in the pot. In addition,

there was the standing dish of corned-beef hash, and a loaf of bread made of the flour of dark spring wheat.

The pack did Ella visible good. The fever abated, but the great blue eyes looked heavy and leaden. Mrs. Moseby prepared a dropped egg on a nice bit of toast, and tried to tempt the child's appetite. She tasted a single mouthful, and then pushed the plate away with her weak little hand, and sank back upon the pillow.

"Here, father," said the thoughtful wife, "eat this egg. It will strengthen you."

"No, no, Margaret; eat it yourself. You look like a ghost. I shall have you in bed long before night, I am afraid."

Mrs. Moseby did eat it, sharing the dainty with little Will.

"What shall we do about the washing?" said she, trying to clear away the breakfast things with the heavy baby on her arm. "You know it had to lie over last week, and the children can hardly go two days longer without a change."

"I'll tell you what can be done, Margaret," replied the good husband: "this is my free

day. I will pound out the clothes and put them in soak. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be able to get them out. I shouldn't exactly like to have the deacons catch me over the wash-tub," he added, with a half smile, that had a world of sadness in it; "but it would be far more respectable to find me there, Margaret, than to find you, in your present state of health."

"I am only a drag on you, Stephen," said the wife, with unbidden tears springing to her eyes. "Father used to say that nothing hampers a man like a feeble, sick, ailing wife; and I have come to feel the truth of his words."

"Margaret," said the minister with great difficulty, owing to a disagreeable sensation in his throat, "haven't we borne our cross together, and haven't we tried to live and work in the Master's service? What would this world be to one without the other?"

It was almost ten o'clock before the minister got about his novel task. Mrs. Moseby had her hands full with the sick child, and her troublesome baby, who was teething.

"We must get along with a picked-up dinner to-day," said she. "I don't feel as if I had the strength or time to cook any thing."

The clothes were about half-boiled, and the parson was working briskly, with his coat off, when Mother Folger drove up to the door at a round pace.

"O Stephen!" cried the poor minister's wife, running out into the kitchen in dire distress, "there comes Sister Folger. She will surely stay to dinner. What shall we do? There isn't a thing cooked in the house."

"Then we will offer her a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple," replied the minister, with the least little touch of sarcasm.

"O dear me!" sighed Mrs. Moseby, "I would rather see any body else in the world. I know she is a good Christian woman; but she always manages to make me thoroughly uncomfortable."

The boiler of steaming clothes was hastily set off the stove into a corner. Mrs. Folger strode into the parsonage sitting-room, filling it with a sense of her large, obtrusive personality. Her sharp eyes detected every grain of dust and every sign of litter and disorder that lurked in corners, or strewed the old, threadbare carpet. She was armed with the little tin pail.

"I have brought you over some buttermilk,"

she remarked, after the first greeting. "It's handy to have in the house, when you want to stir up a saleratus-cake in a hurry."

Mrs. Moseby was meekly grateful. She did not reveal the fact that she considered saleratus bread pernicious to health, and that she never fed it to her family.

"So Ella is down sick, is she?" inquired the good woman, settling into a big rocking-chair, and undoing her bonnet-strings with a decidedly stay-to-dinner expression. "I shouldn't a bit wonder if it was scarlet fever. They say there's a sight of it round."

"O don't mention that horrible disease!" cried the distressed mother, with a spasm of the heart.

"We must make up our minds to look things in the face, Sister Moseby, and take what the Lord sends. I have always thought you were too tender of your children. The way is to toughen them when they are young. Look at my family. I never paid ten dollars for doctor's bills in my life."

"We do our own doctoring," remarked the minister's wife, "and it is simple enough, too—nothing but cold water, and plenty of fresh air."

"I haven't any opinion of them new-fangled notions. What the child wants to clear out her system is a dose of castor oil, say four great spoonfuls, followed up with epsom salts or a mild blue pill."

"I should dislike to administer such doses to a suffering child," remarked Mrs. Moseby mildly.

"Well, for my part, I don't set myself up to be wiser than other folks," replied the visitor, with a toss of the head; "and I shouldn't be a mite surprised if Dr. Bolus got miffed at not being called in, and should go over and hire a pew in the new Baptist meeting-house."

Mrs. Moseby laid down the baby, who had dropped asleep, sucking his chubby little thumb, and slipped into the kitchen. "Stephen," said she, "we must manage to get up a dinner some way. Sister Folger has laid off her things, and she has just been giving me a lecture about Ella. I dare say there is something on her conscience for you, too."

"May the Lord give me patience!" replied the minister, looking deeply annoyed.

"'As our day, so shall our strength be,'" responded the little wife with a sigh. "That

promise supports me a great many times. You had better run over to the butcher's shop, dear, and buy a small steak—the smallest you can get. You know I don't care for meat, neither do the children. I will excuse myself, and make a cup of coffee; and we can open that last can of plum preserves for dessert."

By the time dinner was on the table Mrs. Moseby looked ready to drop. One of her bad headaches was coming on. The visitor's loud, emphatic voice woke little Benny out of his nap, and he sat straight up and screamed, until the mother took him upon her lap to hold while she poured the coffee.

"I shall have to tackle you about yesterday's sermon," said Sister Folger, suspending a large piece of steak on its way to her mouth, and looking with her incisive eyes straight at the minister's careworn countenance. "It struck me that it didn't go quite deep enough into experimental religion. Says Squire Brewster to me, says he, 'Sister Folger, I wish our beloved pastor would study more. His sermons, latterly, bear marks of haste.' You wont mind my telling you. I thought it would be playing the part of a friend."

The minister colored, in spite of his effort at self-command, and caught himself putting salt into his coffee instead of sugar.

"Thank you, Sister Folger," said he coldly. "Of course, it is well to know the people's minds; but all do not think alike. Deacon Paine, for instance, told me that yesterday's sermon exactly coincided with his views."

Mr. Moseby glanced over at his wife. Her face was growing ashy pale, with violet rings under the weary eyes, and her mouth was set in a rigid line of suffering and endurance.

Sister Folger was not thus to be balked in her efforts to make the minister feel that he stood on slippery places. There were other shots in her locker, and she discharged every one of them before taking leave and turning old Dolly's head and the colt's toward home.

She had hardly driven out of the back yard when Mrs. Moseby went to bed with one of those crushing headaches of hers and a pain in the side. Little Ella had slept peacefully most of the day, and with deep gratitude the minister noted that her forehead and hands were moist with the dew of returning health, while the breath came freely through the parted lips.

He was just putting a cold cloth on his wife's temples when there came a rat-tat upon the front door.

"Who is it?" whispered she as he returned from answering the summons, while she searched his face with a deeply worried glance from her sick eyes.

"Nobody but Brother Holcomb, the missionary agent. He has dropped in to spend the night, on his way up to the Corners. I told him how we were situated—that I could only give him a cold cut for supper; so don't distress yourself at all."

"O dear! It does seem as though he might have stayed away just this once. Last week he was here three days."

"His life has its great trials and privations too, Margaret. Don't you know the Bible says, 'Bear ye one another's burdens?'"

"Our own are more than we know how to bear sometimes, Stephen. This has been a Blue Monday for both of us."

"Not so blue after all, little wife. We ought to be unspeakably thankful that Ella is better. We know where our trust is, and what our reward will be if we endure unto the end."

A FAMILY MAN.

THE Rev. Mr. Hobert sat by his study-table in the raw, uncomfortable twilight. He was half sick and wholly discouraged, and the outward aspect of the place appeared to partake of the somberness of his thoughts. There was a little lingering spark of fire in the grate—that kind of fire which makes a room more comfortless than the absence of any outward and visible sign of heat. The chair in which he sat showed the last stages of shabbiness, and no better specimen of lame and decrepit gentility could be found than the study-table itself.

Overhead, in a chamber used as a nursery and general sitting-room, the prancing about of a band of noisy children did not tend to soothe the morbid condition of his nerves. At that particular moment the minister was not in sympathy with child-life. The little dark and light heads clustering there up stairs about mamma's

knee had followed each other in quick succession ; and, instead of the exceeding great joy of paternity, had ever, at first, brought anxious cares and dubious forebodings to the good man's heart. He loved them when they came ; but he never quite got used to the noise and litter of little folks. Now the racket overhead, the bursts of fun, the scrambling and frolicsome din, chafed his spirit, and did not tend to ease him of his worries and vexations.

It was near the end of the year, and generally in the clerical household a pretty large gap intervened between the figurative extremities which ought to have met in order to make things pleasant. The minister had been working with chilled feet and a burning head over his Sunday's sermon ; and, as the doctrinal tangle grew more and more perplexing, he pushed the papers aside, and leaned back in his shabby old chair with an inward sense of the foolishness of preaching.

It was a moment of intense self-depreciation, such as comes to most people now and then in life, although they may not give it voice. For the time being the Reverend Mr. Hobert felt that he had made a life error—had mistaken his

calling. What good, he asked himself, had he accomplished, or was he likely to accomplish? His poor and struggling Church dragged on a feeble existence. Souls were not brought to a sense of sin by his ministrations. There was a state of apathy, indifference, and lukewarmness all about him ; and he could do nothing to turn the scale in favor of a more complete consecration to Christ. The enemy had sown tares on every side, and he was too weak to pluck them away.

Mr. Hobert's temperament frequently led him into states of religious exaltation, followed by violent reactions. On this particular evening the practical aspects of his life gained the ascendancy, and he looked at his thin white hands in the growing dusk, and thought of his bodily weakness and low vitality, and questioned with himself as to what he could have done if he had not entered the ministry. Certainly there was no aptitude for worldly business in his composition. If it had not been for the practical headpiece of his little wife, things in the household would have gone more hopelessly astray than was usual.

The minister pulled himself up sharply from

this train of reflections, with a consciousness that the Master he served would brook no worldly estimate of profit and loss from the laborer in his vineyard ; but there was a standing grievance in the good man's mind, and he turned to it gloomily, as a half explanation of why he had been distanced and left behind by those who started no fairer and evinced no more zeal in the calling than he had done. With the shadows gathering round him, and the toes of his shabby boots extended toward the spark in the grate, which emitted no heat, he thought of his large and increasing family with a certain unreasonable sense of injury, and there were prospects in the near future which rendered his discouragement peculiarly dense and cheerless.

Overhead the patter of little racing feet was like raindrops on the roof, and there came a burst of merriment that seemed to jar upon the minister's mood. He got up and strode to the foot of the chamber stairs, and called out in an impatient tone :

"Hannah, do speak to those children. They are distracting me with their uproar. I cannot write a line of my sermon until they get quiet."

Having thus relieved his feelings, Mr. Hobert went back and sat down again in the shadows, and began to chew over his cud of bitter thoughts. He had not sufficient energy to light the lamp standing upon the mantel-piece, or to stir the fire into something like life. Things were far from being at their worst with the minister, but his mind was scarcely capable of taking on a deeper tinge of despondency.

Up stairs, in the nursery, which was shabbier even, if possible, than the study below, quite a different scene was taking place. Mrs. Hobert, a small woman, with a mass of silky brown hair coiled round her head, and eyes that won their way to people's hearts by their unaffected loveliness, was seated in a low rocker, holding little Winny in her lap. Winny was the youngest of the children, and not quite two years old—nothing but a “blessed baby,” as old Patience, the family domestic, said to herself indignantly, while she did up certain mysterious little garments and laid them in a pathetic pile on the ironing-table.

Winny was in her night-gown now, with the flossy locks of light, fly-away hair hanging over her cheeks, in the full enjoyment of her usual

go-to-bed frolic with mamma, in which it was invariably told off on her pink toes how this little pig went to market and that little pig stayed at home. Jack, in what he called his "nocturnal," was enjoying a game of pitch-pil-low with Martin, who had not yet mastered the hard knots in his shoe-strings. Phil, in a baggy pair of night-drawers, with his hair in queer little quirks, owing to a recent ablution, was practicing gymnastics on the end of the mantel-piece and prancing about generally ; while little Mary, seated on the floor, was cuddling mamma's slippers and listening to the little woman's stories.

When Mr. Hobert's warning voice came sounding up from the hall Mrs. Hobert felt half guilty for her share of the fun ; so she said, in quite a changed tone, "Hush, children, we have been disturbing poor papa. It was very inconsiderate." There was something half pitiful, half protecting in the way she spoke of "poor papa." "No more capers for to-night," she added. "Now we will say prayers and by-low."

"Me don't want to p'ay," lisped Jack, rubbing his eyes with his fat round fists, and giving a long yawn. "Me's teepy."

"How can a little boy be sure God will take care of him through the dark night-time if he don't say prayers?" urged mamma.

"But, look here," broke in Phil, "if God knows every thing, he must know just what we're going to say beforehand, so where's the use of praying?"

Mrs. Hobert was accustomed to "posers" from her young philosopher, which she was too wise to attempt to argue away; so the prayers were said as reverentially as might be, the five little forms were tucked snugly away in bed, and after Martin, the mother-boy, had had the last clinging kiss, Mrs. Hobert stole down stairs and opened the study door.

"Why, Philip!" she exclaimed, in a voice which was always pleasant, "have you been sitting all this time in the dark without a fire?"

"I was busy thinking, and one don't need a light to think by. I suppose I must have let the fire go out. But it don't matter," he replied dolefully.

"I'm afraid there's danger of a fit of the b.-b.'s," responded the little woman, trying to laugh, as she groped her way to the mantel-

piece and struck a match to light the lamp. The b.-b.'s meant blue-blacks, and she had had ample experience of them during the period of her married life.

"I thought we would have such a nice evening together," she continued, chirping away. "The children are snug in bed. I know their noise irritated you, dear ; but children will be children, and it's such a comfort to think of them safe under the blankets. Bless their dear little hearts ! Phil is the ventursomest boy, as old Patience says ; one is never certain he wont break his bones out of a third-story window unless he is fast asleep. It's such a stormy evening I don't believe dear, old, prosy Mr. Jones will be in to talk over the Church debt ; and you can read me a part of your sermon, or that last magazine article. Mrs. Forbish said she liked it because it was so transcendental, and I came very near laughing in the good woman's face. Dear me, Philip, I have such a propensity for fun, it quite stands in my light." All this time she was kneeling upon the patched carpet, to lay some tiny sticks of kindling-wood on the fire, and blowing it into a bright blaze.

Mr. Hobert was not in the mood to yield

immediately to the little woman's cheering. He meant to indulge the luxury of low spirits still longer; and there was the half-defined sense of injury, which Mrs. Hobert's blitheness irritated instead of allaying. The fire in the grate was snapping cheerily now, the lamp sent out a comfortable glow, and the shabby bareness of the room looked far less bald with the minister's wife seated there by the table, busying herself with the work-basket.

"I don't know but I am mistaken, Hannah," Mr. Hobert began, speaking with a little hardness in his tone, "but it does seem to me sometimes as if you hardly realized our situation."

"It isn't worth while to try and realize all the bare facts of life, Philip. Sometimes we can do nothing but trust. You know how it is said, 'He tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb;'" and a pathetic smile came over her face as she took a tiny scrap of work out of the work-basket with fairy-like hems and tucks, one of those things that bring all manner of sweet suggestions to a loving woman's heart.

"Of course, that is generally the best and safest way; but sometimes it is well to look at the very worst that can happen."

"Don't talk in that doleful way, Philip, as if some dreadful calamity were about to overwhelm us ;" and she rested her hands in her lap, and looked at him with real anxiety growing in her eyes. "You know I am not quite strong now, and such things make me nervous."

"It's of no consequence, Hannah," and the grieved tone was slightly intensified in the minister's voice ; "I don't want to worry you, only Dr. Blakely says my throat is in such a condition I ought not to preach for some weeks. He advises complete rest, change of scene, and travel. He says I ought not to use my brain in writing sermons ; and the truth is, I have felt jaded and spiritless for a long time. But what good does a doctor's counsel do to a man hampered as I am ? He might as well ask me to make bricks without straw."

"I know you need a change sadly," said the little wife, still resting her hands in her lap. "The Church would give you a vacation of a month or six weeks without a word, and would raise the money to defray the expense of a journey, only they all feel so poor now it would be hard to ask them. But, look here, Philip," she added, after pondering something for a moment,

“ why couldn’t you exchange with Mr. Norton ? You would only be obliged to preach once on Sunday, and there would be no wear and tear of writing sermons. Mr. Norton keeps a horse, and you could drive about and take plenty of out-door exercise. Besides, he has a sister here in town, with whom he could stay. You know, just at present, I should hardly be able to entertain company.”

“ The plan might answer,” responded Mr. Hobert, getting up, and striding gloomily two or three times across the room, “ if it were not for going away and leaving you. No, it’s not to be thought of. With my cares and responsibilities, I must grind away at the mill as long as I have power to stand.”

“ You make me feel like a great burden,” said the little woman, getting up hastily and going over to where he stood. “ You need not consider me at all, dear. I shall get along bravely ; and, if I don’t ” — she checked herself, and brightened up, “ old Patience is a host in herself, and the children are always kind and thoughtful at such times. I cannot bear to feel you are injuring yourself on my account. It would be hard to know I was a clog in the

wheel," and something choky and teary came into her voice, which did not in the least tend to outwardly soften her husband.

"Of course, we must make the best of existing circumstances," returned Mr. Hobert in a still more rasping tone, steeling himself against the pressure of the hand the little woman had laid upon his arm; "but I can't get past the fact that, with a large and increasing family, I am breaking down, like an old machine that has worn out all its bolts and screws."

"How can you separate yourself from your family, Philip, even in thought? Why, the children are part of us, like the very innermost fiber of our being."

"There is no question of separating myself from my family. I was only looking at the thing from an abstract point of view; but I believe women never get away from their feelings."

"No, not when their children are concerned;" and Mrs. Hobert, with a little flush on her face, turned abruptly, perhaps to hide something that was welling up from her heart to her soft eyes, and sat down again on her chair. "I cannot speculate about what might have been," she

went on, with the least bit of a falter in her voice. "God has given them to us, and I have faith to believe he will help us over all the rough places. If I had an unwelcome thought for the little one that has never breathed, I should fear it might some day look up into my face and reproach me. I know there have been trials and discouragements all along, Philip, and you have borne the brunt of them. Perhaps I haven't been as faithful a helpmeet, as good and loving a wife, as I ought to have been; but, if God spares my life, I will try harder to bear up my end of the burden," and a round tear fell glistening on to the little sleeve Mrs. Hobert had again taken up.

"Don't get hysterical, Hannah," said the minister, still in an east-wind humor, that did not, however, prevent inward pricks. "I am not complaining of Providence any more than you are; only, with danger of my throat giving way, it isn't to be expected the future should look very bright."

Mrs. Hobert sat without making any reply, for nothing is more disagreeable to an amiable woman, even such as she was, than to be called hysterical. She sadly needed a few words of

tenderness and sympathy herself, and the anticipated pleasure of the evening had been completely spoiled. The two lapsed into silence ; and then, after a time, Mr. Hobert took the Bible to read the evening lesson. He did not choose some tender, consoling passage from the New Testament, but turned to a chronological table in the Old Scripture, and somehow the prayer that followed seemed to lack fervor.

That night the little wife lay awake a long time, and the next day there were violet rings under her eyes and a jaded look in her face. Toward evening she was resting on the bed in the nursery, quite fagged out with a bad headache. Winny was patting her cheeks with baby touches and pitying poor mamma. Phil was unlacing her boots, and Martin mixing some soothing potion in a glass, when there came a loud ring at the door-bell.

"Go and see what's wanting, Phil," said she, raising her head wearily from the pillow.

"Somebody for papa," said Phil, capering to the head of the stairs, "and he's going out."

She sat up, pushed back the heavy waves of hair from her pale face ; then she went down

stairs, and found her husband in the hall putting on his overcoat.

"They have sent round for me in a great hurry from Baxter's Hotel, in Grant-street," he explained.

"I hope it's a wedding," said the little woman, trying to speak cheerily, "and that you'll get a good big fee. Here, dear, are your hat and gloves. Wait until I brush your collar. You musn't go out without a muffler and overshoes, for it looks as if it might come on to a storm before long."

He kissed her hastily, and ran down the steps; and she went back to bed again. Old Patience had to come up that evening and undress the children, and the cup of tea she brought her mistress stood untasted on the stand. At nine o'clock there came a brief note from the minister, that ran thus:

"DEAR HANNAH: Do not be worried about my absence. I have found a lonely, dying creature here, and it is my duty to stay with him during the night. If there should be any sudden need of me, let Patience send over neighbor Fisk's man. I never realized before how

desolate a human soul is without any thing to love—with neither child nor friend to soothe the bed of death. It's an awful revelation, and God meant it for me."

Mr. Hobert had listened to a sad story, gasped out by the stranger dying alone in a hotel. In those last, solemn, touching moments he had listened to bitter, unavailing regrets for a selfish, loveless life. He had spoken such words as belonged to his sacred calling—out of the heart—of a reconciled Father and dear Saviour and friend down in the shadows of the dark valley. Before the last moment drew on he had given his solemn promise to bear the dying man's forgiveness to a brother in a western city, from whom he had long been alienated. Some business details had been settled. The minister's holiday journey had been strangely provided for; and now a rigid form lay stretched on the bed, in that upper room of Baxter's Hotel, with a softened, hopeful look about the gray lines of the haggard face.

Mr. Hobert was hurrying home now, in the light of a chilly dawn, with quite a new aspect of life opening before him. He had been pro-

foundly affected in presence of that grim death-bed, and never in approaching his home had he before felt such deep humility and thankfulness to God. He thought of himself as a family man, and of wife and children, with a new emotion. A great stone had been rolled away, and he ran joyfully up the icy steps, and put in his latch-key with impatience, as if he had long been separated from the objects of his love.

There was a tallow candle on the hall table, burning faintly in the weak daylight, as if it had been up watching; and presently old Patience came from the kitchen, with her bed-gown on over a quilted petticoat, and her head done up in what appeared to be a bolster-case.

"Bless your heart, sir!" she broke out, half crying, half laughing for joy, "it was all over, as slick as any thing, e'en a'most before the doctor got here; and we've got a fine boy, with the beautifullest head of hair! I had to break it sudding like, for fear you'd go right up to misses, now she's in her fust doze. She wouldn't have you sent for, for fear it would worrit you, and kep a-charging of me to have the tea hot agin you should come in. And when it was at the worst, says the dear lamb, a-gitting hold of my

old hand, says she, 'Patience, if any thing should happen to me, promise you'll stand by him and the children.' I had to turn round and give a cough, for fear of breaking down. She's a saint, if there ever was one, and the unselfish-est bein' on airth."

During this address the minister settled against the wall, and looked, as Patience expressed it, as weak as a cat. He pulled out his handkerchief and held it to his eyes, and what went on behind it nobody ever knew. At last he asked, in a very humble, low voice, "Patience, could I see it?"

Patience seemed to know what the impersonal pronoun stood for. "Take off your boots, sir," said she, "and come up stairs."

The minister obeyed, and in the hall a bundle of flannel was brought to him and carefully unrolled, until a pair of tiny red fists doubled themselves up, and there was revealed a black head, a wrinkled old-man's face, with the mouth open like a birdling's bill, and the eyes still sealed. The minister's brèast was shaken with a conflict of emotions. He had come from a strange and desolate death-bed to take in his arms this blossom just opened upon

the tree of life. He pressed his little boy to his bosom, and the tender touch seemed to open a new fountain of sweetness within his soul.

"Is that you, Philip?" called out a weak voice from the next room.

He stepped in softly, still carrying the child ; and, as he kissed Hannah's cheek, and left some tears there, it seemed as though he had just learned the joys of paternity, and the blessing of a good wife, whose price is above rubies.

A NEW YEAR AND A NEW LIFE.

AN idle street crowd had collected about the door of an elegant mansion. It was the occasion of a small party given to Constance Morton, daughter of a rich banker, on the eve of her marriage. This was understood to be a marriage in high life, which means money and position wedding the same coveted things. The one little irregularity not taken into account was that Constance Morton ardently loved Ralph Tennent, and probably the high-bred object of her affections returned the sentiment as far as was consistent with his somewhat blase style of being.

The sky is dark above. The city roars around. Gas lamps make splashes of light upon the pavement, and dot the streets like rows of stars. In front of the banker's mansion carriage doors bang, and dainty pieces of womanhood float up the broad steps, like divini-

ties wrapped in clouds. They draw aside their silken trains under snowy opera cloaks, and give glimpses of bouquets in a glitter of silver fringe, and golden or raven beads under mists of rose and azure too thin to quench the fire of diamonds and rubies.

These glimpses, and the magic world represented by the blazing windows of the house, were peculiarly tantalizing to the crowd watching without, which was not so stolid a crowd as one sometimes sees. When the door opened, and gave forth flashes of intenser brightness, and the band, that was beginning on a soft, dreamy overture, sprinkled the street a little more freely with its sounds, the people upon the pavement pushed and hustled to get nearer the scene of enchantment.

It was the cold time of year, and it was cold with heavy, creeping dampness that gets into the bones. Some in that crowd could ill afford to stand there and let the frost nip their fingers and toes. They were dirty and ragged, and, perhaps, had gone about the streets hungry for hours ; but they stopped and forgot their misery while staring at the elegant festive house and the arriving guests.

Three men had separated themselves a little from the group huddled close for the warmth of contact. They were burly and black browed, and a careful observer would have remarked one of them, who wore a muffler pulled high up on his left cheek. They did not bandy jokes such as loitering washerwomen or newsboys indulged in. They set their teeth hard against the cold, whispered a few words, and, when a blue-coated policeman turned the corner, slunk away in an opposite direction and got lost in the shadows.

The windows of the drawing-room were draped with amber satin, against which, like the snowy foam of long breakers, rested fleecy lace, crossed by ivy and clustered red holly berries, in token of the joy-time, the glad Christmas-tide, that still left its sparkles in children's eyes, and mellowed all hearts by its beautiful sacred lessons. With these were clustered white buds and blossoms, symbols of Constance Morton's happy nuptials, as if love and joy had met together, prosperity and peace had kissed each other.

Through the setting of these windows, so like the frame of an exquisite picture, came oc-

casional glimpses of young Constance herself, the petted child of fortune, the sunshine of her stately home, the crowned favorite of love, with a bride's great blessing trembling before her eyes. She had a pale, clear complexion, with little color save what gathered in the scarlet lips; large, innocent, trustful brown eyes, and hair that fell loose in golden threads. She was a peculiarly rich type of blonde beauty, and, in a dress of pale violet that turned to silver where the light fell upon it, she looked like a golden-hearted flower floating upon a sunny tide.

Her beauty was rare and striking; but it was an inherited beauty, as a glance at James Morton, her father, where he stood bowing to receive his guests, could show. He had the same clear olive tint, bronzed to the hue of manliness. His rather sparse locks and fine mustache had lost their gold for the silver frost of middle life. He was erect, dignified, and high-bred, with a form much above the common height, and being a man of influence and large wealth and a widower, found himself the center of a select circle of admirers.

The company was select, called mainly from relatives and intimate friends. At a compara-

tively early hour there came a lull in the rumbling of carriage wheels, and the group of idle people before the house melted away—some beyond the bleary-eyed gas-lamp on the corner, some toward the noisy avenues, tinkling with horse-cars, and some out to the great human current on Broadway.

There remained behind a small dark bow-legged man, with a pinched and hungry look, almost livid from the cold. He was "dressed" in cast-off garments at least three sizes too large, which gave him the appearance of shucking round in his clothes. His unclean hands were half buried in the cuffs of his coat, pinned across the chest, perhaps to suggest a pleasant little fiction concerning a waistcoat and shirt underneath, helped along by a wisp of handkerchief straggling over the greasy collar. His whole aspect evinced dogged shiftlessness, and no less dogged devotion to the rum-bottle.

This man's small fiery eyes were now intently watching a woman who crouched there by the area rail, in the full blaze of the window. She was bareheaded, and had an old cape about her shoulders. Her hair, which was fair and abundant, hung in tangled wads down her

back. A young thing, too, you would have said, even at a casual glance, while you shuddered at the possible depth of depravity her image conjured up. She was gazing at the dancers, whose shadows fell upon the curtains, and listening to the music, as it threaded the entanglement of the "German," with a wistful, subdued look.

The Morton type of face was strongly marked, and this creature's countenance, under its smears, had the same clear oval as Constance Morton's. Her tangled elf-locks, all tarnished as they were, had something of the sunny splendor of the prospective bride's. Her limbs, under their repulsive rags, were molded in the same shapely mold. Her grimy hands, clinging to the area rail, flushed with the same blood that tinted Constance Morton's rosy palms. No contrast was ever more complete. If the affianced bride within was a golden-hearted flower, worn on loving breasts, this degraded girl outside was the same flower trampled in the mire by brutish feet, where no hand was so Christ-like, or regardless of its own purity, as to stoop and pick it up, in the hope of smoothing its dragged petals to the likeness of heaven-born beauty.

We decry sensationalism, and yet how much of it there is in actual life—in truth so much stranger than fiction—that the boldest romancer is often deterred from depicting what he knows comes to pass in the world. James Morton, the banker, was rich and prosperous, wrapped fold on fold in a spotless reputation ; but, all unconscious itself, his secret sin had come there under those lighted windows to find him out. Strange as it may seem, there was a bond between beautiful young Constance at the top of an earthly paradise, and that unclean cast-away shivering and hungry at her gates.

I cannot go back to the past and drag out to daylight a story of shame and desertion. It is a common story, one whose outlines almost any fancy can fill. Years before James Morton suddenly left the country, and was absent twenty months. When he returned all trace of the woman he had known as Margaret Raynor and her child had disappeared. The woman, it was believed, had died in a hospital, the child had died too, or else was lost among the thieves and beggars and street Arabs of New York. James Morton devoutly hoped the former, and came at last to believe what he hoped. Provi-

dence or fate had been very kind to him, and he showed his gratitude by giving largely to every benevolent object which offered itself. If remorse ever preyed upon his vitals, no one knew it. It did not impair his appetite or disturb his slumbers. He was a man of perfect health and unfailing spirits, and he ate and drank, and was merry all these years the Jail-bird—she had no other name—was growing up to womanhood.

The girl was in a strange mood that night. The sharp cunning had almost faded out of her eyes. She had eaten nothing since morning, but she did not mind the pinching pain in her stomach, or the nip of the wind across her badly-protected shoulders. She seemed bound by the spell of music that went threading its way through many silver mazes, rising and swelling like a great tide, or dying away in sobs like a weary wind. How little we know of the thoughts of 'vagrants and beggars ; of people who live in kennels, and whose souls are only half awake. There are those who sneer at the mere suspicion of any thing beyond a knavish device or bodily sensation as connected with the swinish multitude ; but it pleases me to hope that as she stood there, all unconscious

of who or what she was, some hidden chord in the poor girl's bosom responded to the fine touch of the music ; that perhaps she was back in a dim time long past, when a pair of little hands patted and smoothed the face of a dying woman, when a pair of childish lips felt the icy chill of that woman's mouth, and had tried with kisses to make it warm again. Perhaps out of the distance came some broken words, wild and sad, and ending in sobs. Perhaps—who can tell ?—a faint vision of what *she* might have been, in something like a home, such as she had never known, at sight of the fair, sweet young girls' faces growing rosy, as the whole scene swam and swayed, rose and fell in light and glory, may have swept her out for an instant from the bad, ugly reality and left its glow upon her face.

Whatever the vision was it did not last long, for the little hirsute man who had been watching her crept out of the shadow, holding himself as if ready to dodge an invisible blow, and when within ear-shot he whispered raspingly,

“ Out o' cage at last ! ”

The Jail-bird turned slowly round and drew herself up with an expression of contempt.

"Don't twit, Bill Dick," said she; "two can play at that game."

"To be sure," returned Dick, with a dry cackle; "we must respec' them fine things called a lady's feelins'. 'Spose you was blessin' the bride"—pointing upward to the bright windows. "I've seen you afore now stand by church doors, and mow and mock when the minister had his hands over a couple, as if you would snatch away the blessin', and put something that didn't sound so well in its place."

"There you are, at it again, Bill Dick, twitting on what's done and gone. As if I felt so toward this un'; as if I could feel so towards this un'."

"What's this un' to you, Bird? She is rich, and you love rich nobbs, do ye, that sleep soft and feed high?"

"I don't know what she is to me," said the girl in a softer tone, "but when she came to the winder a spell back, and stood there pullin' some flowers to pieces, while her husband, that's to be, looked down in her face, I felt the blood jump to the ends of my fingers."

"Whew!" Bill gave an astonished whistle, his unpleasant little eyes pushing out of their

rims. "What possesses the girl? Got religion? joined the Church? turned track contributor?"

The idea tickled him, and he chuckled low down in his throat.

"Stop your clack, Bill Dick; you spoke of my blessin' the bride, and so I will." The Jail-bird began slowly treading a strange measure, her shaggy locks and tattered garments fluttering in the cold night air, while her hands seemed to shed invisible flowers before the bride's steps, and her eyes were raised with a softened, subdued look, as if they saw some vision of sweetness or beauty painted on the dark sky.

Bill stood gazing at this incantation quite bewildered, as if doubtful of the girl's sanity.

"There," said she, stopping still with her hands clapsed, "I've no present for the bride, but if I could I'd give her the good times that would ha' belonged to me if I'd had any folks, and any home out o' the street. I don't expect you to understand me, Bill Dick, and I don't know as I quite understand myself, to-night; but you haint got mind to sense much."

"Yes, I have got mind," retorted Bill, firing up at this injurious imputation; "but it would take more than a Philadelphia lawyer to find

out what you mean. You're a queer un, Bird, that you be. But come along now," roughly laying his hand on the girl's shoulder; "the covies will be arter us if we stay here. They'll think we're cookin' up mischief for some of these nobs behind their plate glass and brown-stone fronts. But they don't know what lambs we be, do they, Bird?"

"Let me alone," said the girl, shaking off his hand, as if it were an offense for the man to touch her. "You needn't dog my steps, and I wont have it," while a gleam shot out of her eyes.

Bill Dick knew her temper. He said no more, but crouched and watched in the shadow of the steps, until she started silently and sullenly off down toward the East River. He crept on behind, and little by little gained on her, and then shambled along side, making sure first that all was safe.

"You haint asked after little Davy or Shad," said he in an oily tone.

"Is there any thing to tell?" the girl asked, after a moment of silence.

"Not much, only I b'lieve Shad's picked up some since you was nabbed last. He looks

thicker through the ribs. And little Davy, you know how it is with him. He's allus pinin' arter you. Strange what a hold you've got on that boy, while he never somehow seems to belong to me and his ma. Yesterday little Davy shied a ham bone at Shad, and it made a skrimmidge. You know what side I takes in a skrimmidge. I was naturally born with a feelin' heart, and its been agin' me all my life. If I am wantin' in intellect," he added cringingly, "I don't lack heart."

The Jail-bird did not reply, although she was evidently expected to reinforce Bill's good opinion of his affectional nature, and they walked on in silence for four or five long blocks, leaving the respectable, cleanly portion of the city behind them. A blue-coated watchman, swinging his club, was strolling the same way. He stopped on the corner of a street not far from the water side—repulsive by day, but hideous by night—stopped and dandled, making his eyes do sharp duty. The clammy chill in the air had covered the stones with an unpleasant paste, the houses were old and dilapidated—human kennels reeking with uncleanness—each of the low drinking shops showed a red eye,

that sent a sinister gleam through the thickening mist, and the sounds which issued from them gave the impression that Cyclops, who owned the eye, was getting hopelessly inebriated. The street was filled with a low crowd, the dregs and lees of a great city's population, that during the day-time get shaken up, and circulate pretty freely through the healthy channels of the municipal body, but when night comes fall down to the level of hideous poverty, making the bad air worse, and the nauseous smells more unendurable.

Bill Dick's wife was mixing with the crowd as usual. She was one of those large, lumpish, dead-white women, in hoop-earrings and a dirty gown, who lean out of window, or stand in filthy door-ways with arms akimbo, as if the whole of time hung on their shoulders. She was the center of a little group before a bake-shop, where the moist warm smells came freely to their senses. As Bill and his companions drew near, one of the men called out,

"Why, here's the Bird, out o' jug, as I live! Got tired of government hotel?"

The girl made no reply, but stood sullenly apart with her tattered cape drawn around her.

"Leff your tongue in lock-up," continued the man, who had spoken to her, venturing nearer, with a bad smile on his face.

"Don't hector the girl to-night," whispered Bill; "she's dangerous. Wait till she's seen little Davy."

"Little Davy," repeated his wife, eyeing him all over from top to toe. "You're a' artful one, you be. I've been waiting and watching for you. Come along home now."

Bill obeyed meekly, and followed his spouse, with the Jail-bird close behind. Just where the houses looked even more hopeless than ever they turned in to the mouth of a pitch-dark alley, unblest by a single ray of gaslight. After groping for a minute between blind walls, they came to a more open space not far from the river, occupied by a wretched building that leaned badly, as if on its last legs, and was blocked up with piles of lumber and the *débris* of a wheelwright's shop. Underneath this shaky edifice was a basement resembling a cave more than any thing else. The only breathing holes or glimpses of daylight the place afforded were two square excavations stuffed with rags and blocked with piles of refuse.

Stumbling down some steps in the darkness, the three came into a den dimly lighted by a wick floating in a basin of oil. The place was hideously bare, with two straw-covered bunks, a pile of rags, and a gleam of fire-light in the blackened hollow of the hearth. These, with a smell of mold, damp, and earthiness, as from an open crypt, made the place Bill Dick called his home.

Sitting up in one of the bunks was a little deformed child. He had been awake and alone in that dreadful place a long time, but he had not cried, or even whimpered. You could not tell how old he was. The body was withered and diminutive. The soft brown hair clustered about a childish, blue-veined forehead, but the great wide-open eyes were piteously old. What they saw beyond the mere surface-seeing of other eyes is known only to the angels. This was little Davy, Bill Dick's only child.

If he had been a sturdy boy with a pair of stout fists, and an aptness for profanity and street lore, Bill Dick might have bestowed upon him a certain kind of coarse love. But those old, searching eyes gave the man creepy sensations, and seemed almost to justify his slinking

off to the rum-shop. The piteously-scarred hands, and little withered body under its old blouse, witnessed against the boy's mother, and were a perpetual reminder of what she had done. One day, when Davy was a baby, Mrs. Dick took a drop, a very long drop indeed, owing to her spongy nature and power of absorption. The infant was lying on the floor. She staggered over him with a kettle of boiling stuff, and the accident happened. Why he lived is one of the inscrutable mysteries of Providence; but the stolid mother had wronged him too terribly to love him well.

At the first touch of Bird's foot on the cellar stairs a lean yellow cat jumped from some hiding-place and began to cry almost like a human being. She took the creature up in her arms, and it rubbed its sharp body against the girl's neck and hair with every demonstration of intense delight.

"Dear old Shad, are you glad to see me?"

The deformed boy had heard her voice, and he called out eagerly, "Whimsey, O Whimsey, is that you?"

Instantly the girl was down by the bunk with the little scarred hands in hers, pressing them,

laughing and crying at the same moment, kissing the little old face all over in a hungry way, as if she could not get enough to satisfy her heart.

"It's you, Whimsey, I know it's you; stoop down so I can feel your face. Why, you're poorer than you used to be."

"Yes, Davy, I've had a bad cough, that's worried me a good deal."

"I didn't know folks was ever sick there on the Island," the boy said reflectively, with his finger laid along his cheek. "I thought they was too happy to be sick."

"They can't allus help theirselves," said the girl evasively.

"I knew you would come back to-night, Whimsey," the child added, as if thinking something out. "You never told me a lie."

The girl's head went down, and in the dark he could not see the blush of shame that dyed her cheeks crimson.

"I saw you right over there, Whimsey. You wore a black veil, but your face was shinin' and bright. 'Twasn't this face or hair, but O, so beautiful."

"Like a bride's face?" murmured the girl softly.

"Dunno what a bride is," said Davy. "It was like the face I see when I'm asleep. And I heard a name called three times, and I've tried and tried to think what was the name."

"Hist," said his companion, checking him gently, "you make the creeps run over me. Folks is warned that way. They say some one's sure to die."

"Mebbe it's me," said the child, looking far off. "I don't know what it means to die, but I wouldn't be afeared."

"You're a bad boy to talk about dying and leaving your poor Whimsey all alone!" cried the girl, clasping him again passionately in her arms.

"But you might go too, Whimsey, and we'd be better off. Don't you 'spose folks is warmer after they die? Don't they see the great sky such as you show me above the houses when you carry me out of this place, and a river bank with trees on it, and little birds in the trees, and grass to lie down on? That's where I think we'll go when we're as dead as we can be."

"You're an awful queer 'un to talk," said the girl, "and I wish you wouldn't talk that way. Why don't you ask about the Island?"

"Is it just as enchantin' as ever, Whimsey?" the boy asked, with his great eyes fixed on her face; "that's the word you used. You called it enchantin'!"

"Pretty much so," said the girl, as if speaking of a fairy garden.

"And what word did my old friend send."

"Do you mean them bird friends and flower friends?"

"In course, Whimsey. What others could I mean."

"They all send their love."

"I dreamed, Whimsey," cocking his head much to one side and looking superlatively old, "that I went to live with them friends, and they made my back straight, and gave me a good pair of legs to walk on, and nice smooth hands like yours."

"There never was such an old-fashioned un' afore," said the girl. "I've got a present the Island friends sent over to you," she continued as she fumbled in the bosom of her dress. "See here, Davy," and, with a stealthy look toward Bill and his wife, she produced something with a glint of gold about it—a tiny locket not larger than a dime piece, opening by a spring, to show

a tress of fine silky hair that must have been cut from a baby's head.

The deformed boy took it, and turned it over and over in silence.

"Aint it a pretty plaything, Davy, such as a rich child might like to play with?"

"It aint no plaything!"- said the child, dissatisfied, and looking at her searchingly. "I don't know where you got it, and I don't want it." Suddenly he fell into one of the passionate fits which sometimes seized him. He threw the locket back at her, and tried to beat her with his little hands. "I b'lieve you stole the thing. You're a bad girl, and I wont never love you again."

The boy lay down sullenly on the straw of the bunk, and his companion, hiding the trinket in her bosom, crept off to a dark corner.

Bill Dick and his wife had been enjoying their domesticity as usual. Bill, with his hat and coat off, in perhaps the raggedest pair of trousers that ever encased human legs, was blowing up the handful of live embers on the hearth; Mrs. Dick had settled into a state of repose on the other bunk. Household matters were the last things weighing on her mind.

"What are we to feast on to-night, ma?" Bill asked in a lively tone, wheeling round on his knees, while his hand rotated over the region of his stomach, as if to show an aching void in that vicinity.

"You'll feast on what you've perwided. Them as perwides nothin' can't expect more."

"Now don't, ma, be more personaller than there's any need on. Taint me that's agin' myself, but luck that's agin' me." This was the salve Bill habitually spread upon his wounded sensibilities. "I've been too tender-hearted, ma, and too honest."

"It's want of pluck," returned his wife contemptuously, "and takin' on beggars and beggars' cats."

"Hist! the girl aint like herself to-night; she might show her claws."

"Get under the bed, and stay there."

Bill looked as if he would be most happy to obey the injunction. "Now, ma," he whined, "don't be inhumaner than there's any need on. The girl is something to little Davy, and we can't afford him many luxuries. But this is cheap. We can let her starve with us. What objection is there to her sleepin' in the crib

when I can't rent it to a object of charity? which I mostly can't, because it hasn't got modern improvements enough to suit their fastigulous tastes. The poorest of 'em has a absurd prejudice in favor of a dryer or lighter place."

Bill talked against time, because he knew the lymphatic part of his wife's nature would prevail, as it did. She soon lapsed into quiet. Rummaging in a cupboard, he produced at last some fragments of food upon a broken plate.

"Ha!" muttered he to himself, "wicked, wasteful folks would throw this into the gutter as not good enough for the dog; but it will help fill up, and at a certain stage of our dewelopment filling is the main fack connected with victuals."

Bill was proceeding to warm his supper over the fire, when he detected a cautious movement in the ruinous shop overhead. He put down the light to listen, then edged away toward the door with his eye on Mrs. Dick, whose profound stupor he suspected was due to a black bottle hidden in the straw. "She's a deep un'," thought Bill, "and I'm most glad she's got it this time if there's work a brewing." It required an effort of will to leave the bottle snug

in its hiding place ; but he kept to his purpose, and after listening again while the sounds overhead continued, got his coat and stole like a shadow out of the room.

Bill was unconscious of being followed as he picked his way up a shaky pair of outside steps that led to the shop, which was encumbered with boards and old iron. The Jail-bird was behind him. She had taken off her shoes, and crept on as noiselessly as a ghost. She pushed the hair away from her eyes, and peered through the thick darkness to where Bill had joined a group of three men, lit very dimly by the light of a small lantern. They were the same three men who were lounging a few hours earlier in front of the banker's mansion. One of them, named Pete, who had taken off his muffler, was distinguishable by a long red scar on the neck, that slanted up to the middle of his cheek and gave him a sinister look when a ray from the lantern happened to fall upon it.

The conversation was carried on in whispers, but an audible word now and then furnished the girl with a clew.

"Come, come, Bill," said the one called Pete, raising his voice a little, "I tell you it's going

to be a jolly haul, silver all home from the bank. Sharpe's girl playing the virtuous, high-minded chamber-maid. Had my eye on the house months ago, but the private watch made a hobble. But New Year's Eve he'll take his tip. Only want you on perch, Bill ; not a mite o' danger, and a share o' the shiners."

Bill didn't seem to relish highly the idea of mounting perch. He settled down into himself, doggedly revolving the proposition.

"You see, pals," said he at last, "mebbe I should blunder. I don't belong, as you do, to the regular cracks."

"You're a coward," broke out one of the others, "and a sneak for predicting bad luck."

"I don't predict," said Bill in a sullen whisper.

"Hist!" cried Pete, holding the lantern aloft ; "who's there?"

"It's me," answered the Jail-bird, taking a few steps toward the light, her eyes peering with strange excitement out of a vail of shaggy locks.

"You gave us an ugly start, girl," muttered Pete under his breath.

"Don't be savage," coaxed the girl. "I

want you to take me on instead of him," pointing to Bill. "The Island haint any amusements for one o' my years, and it's natural I should enjoy a little surprise party."

The man smiled grimly. "We know you've got the grit, Bird," said he. "What say you?" with a whisper to the others. In less than a minute he turned back. "You're accepted, Bird. Be at the alley end at half past two sharp. Them that follow our trade must work lively."

All preliminaries settled, they came stealthily out of the ruinous old shop, bent on their evil purpose. The girl took the lead, and turned in at the pit-like entrance to the cellar; there, in the intense murk, something touched her shoulder.

"You'd better ha' let me gone, Bird," said Bill Dick in her ear. "You didn't know the windictiveness of them coves. I've got their secret now, and they'll dog me into the ground, for I can peach. I've got a handle and can turn turn it," slowly imitating the motion with his arm. "I can say they had a rendyvows in the shop, and I overheard their plan. I can put on the screws, and inform, and get a reward. I sha'n't think of doing no such thing. O no,

in course I sha'n't ; but they'll dog me all the same."

" I see," said the girl, with her eyes fixed on the solemn night-sky scintillating with stars—for a keen north wind had blown away the mists and swept the heavens bare—" I see peril ahead."

" Where do you see it ? " gasped Bill, looking behind him in superstitious terror.

" Up there ! " and she lifted her hand. " They say there's a God as knows all things, and if it's true the sky must be his mind, and the stars his thoughts. I know what the wind says. It jabbars, and mutters, and cries out as if it was being murdered. There ! don't you hear it now ? "

A gust of wind sobbed through the alley, and seemed to die away under their feet.

" You're an awful queer un," muttered Bill, retreating into the basement in a dumb-ague fit. His wife was lying just as he had left her, stupid from the fumes of gin, and little Davy was asleep in his bunk. The kettle was bubbling on the fire, but Bill paid no heed to it. His internal crâvings appeared to have given way to a curious mental process that was inter-

rupted every now and then by a motion of his right arm like the turning of a crank.

The Bird crept into the place, an offshoot to the main apartment, where she was allowed to sleep, so low she was forced to stoop to enter it, with scarce an eye-hole for air and light. The bed was a bundle of foul straw. Hang this picture by the side of Constance Morton's exquisite chamber, where the blessed sunshine itself seemed to beg leave to enter; where exquisite falls of lace, and folds of satin, and every thing was soft and rich, the downy, silken nest of a bird of paradise.

The New Year was born, a puny infant crying in the blast. Some had prayed and sobbed over its birth-hour; some had bade it fleet in gayety; some had consecrated it with good resolves and dreams of a better life; some had used it to execute wicked plots, or had drowned it in the fumes of gin; some had measured out the gasps of the dying by its faint pulsations, and others, like Constance Morton, had welcomed it rapturously, as the harbinger of sweet and intoxicating hopes. She was wrapped in rosy dreams that took no note of the wild weather, while the Jail-bird and her companions stole

through the deserted streets on their evil errand.

Pete's spirit had risen at every dodge that evaded the police. "Now lively, boys, lively," he whispered; "there's no reason why the job shouldn't be as neat as a new sixpence. This swell banker may thank us for relievin' him so 'andsomely."

Her short, broken slumber had left a kind of fog about the girl's senses which the cold wind did not wholly blow away. She was in a bad dream, and only woke to something worse, when she found herself on the corner of a wide, handsome avenue, before a fine mansion, which in the darkness looked like a great stone tomb; those windows, now black and empty, a few hours before had streamed with light, and Constance Morton floated about among her guests like an exquisite vision of joy. It was here the poor outcast had blessed the bride. A strange terror made the girl tremble. "Don't rob this house, Pete," she whispered, coming close to him and touching his arm.

"Hist!" He drew the sound out sharp between his teeth, with a muttered imprecation.

"Don't, Pete," the girl pleaded in a distressed

tone. "I've got an interest in this house, I don't know why, and if any thing happens to it to-night, and I'm along, you'll never be in luck again. I've been kind to you in times past. Remember when you got that stab, and had to lay hid, 'twas I that nursed ye for a whole month. Now humor me this time, and I'll go down on my knees to ye ; I'll be your slave the rest of my life."

"Mad jade !" whispered Pete in fierce astonishment. "Stop that play actin' and be quiet, or I'll find a way to quiet ye ; I've done it afore to them as was mourned more by the community than you'd be. Want to play the benevolent, high-toned part, do ye ? It's too late."

"Ungrateful dog !" The words were low, but came with terrible, steady passion. "You think, do ye, when I blessed her purty face and called down happiness on her, and them as belongs to her, I'm comin' creepin' back in the dark to do her harm when she's asleep. I wont do her harm." The last word was a sob.

"Gag the girl," whispered Pete, half choked with savage rage. "She's been drinkin', or she's got the high stericks."

They were all so much in the shadow of the

heavy porch that the girl evaded their hands, which were feeling out to clutch her, long enough to utter a sharp prolonged shriek, that went shuddering away through the wild weather and the black night. There was a flash, a sharp report, and something fell with a groan, face down, on the pavement.

"Leave the rubbish," whispered Pete, touching the prostrate form with his foot. "She'll never cross our path again. Now be off."

Honest citizens sleep like the dead on winter nights. Who shall tell us what happens before our own familiar door between midnight and the first hour of dawn? There is a desert in the midst of populous places. Those who gather the spoils of sin find work easy close to their victims, so close they can almost count their heart throbs. Daylight comes, and we little think that danger has lurked, like a gaunt and hungry wolf, about our walls. We know terrors that the newspaper spreads before us at breakfast time, but we seldom think of those that hovered over us in darkness but did not strike. We seldom remember to be thankful for deliverance from what might have happened here as easily as in the next street.

"Hullo! what's the matter?"

A window was raised in the corner house, and a head hastily thrust out. Presently a man opened the door and descended the steps. A watchman, with his lantern, was running down the street, in the teeth of the wind that tugged at his coat.

"Hurry along there with your light."

"What's to pay?" the policeman called as well as he could for being completely blown.

"There's been foul work, I suspect," said Mr. Morton, for it was he; "I heard a shriek and a pistol shot here outside, and I dressed and came out to learn the-cause."

"My God! here's a woman."

A little ray from the policeman's lantern touched the huddled figure on the pavement, the face was crushed completely under, and covered with thick mats of hair. Mr. Morton stooped down and reached forth his hand, but hastily drew it back with a shudder.

"Whew!" exclaimed the policeman, touching something with his foot; "here's a burglar's jimmy. I guess she was out with a gang. Bear away with the feet, sir."

Mr. Morton bore away, but not without a

certain protest of the nerves and shrinking of the flesh.

"An ugly piece of business," said the officer as he set his lantern on the pavement and knelt down to straighten the limbs, and fumble about the rags which clothed them, in search of the wound that was draining off her life. "Humph, she's a young thing," he added, much as if he had been making a comment on the bad weather.

"I will call my people and send for a surgeon," said the other, standing back, for he shrank constitutionally from disagreeable sights.

"Hold a bit," said his companion, bracing himself against the wind, that came charged now with little steely points of ice, "a whole squad of surgeons couldn't save her. 'Twould take too long to get folks out of their beds, and no use on't neither for such a one as she was. If you'll wait here ten minutes, sir, I'll run round to the station for assistance. Whew! what a night! I'll leave you the lantern, sir."

James Morton was left alone in the night with that thing at his feet and the crooning wind. It was a strange and unpleasant position for a man who guarded himself assiduously from all shocking things. He was as free from super-

stition as most men, but something like physical dread began to creep through his whole being, and constrained him, in spite of his will, to bend down and examine the senseless burden that lay stretched upon the pavement. A little dark pool had by this time collected on the stone. It gave him a slight feeling of nausea, but still he turned his eyes studiously upon the face where the wind had parted the shaggy locks. There was a stern sculptured look about the wan features, as if every line was bent upon telling its secret. The banker stooped nearer, then started back with a cry—shaking in every limb. What had he seen there? Something conjured by the secret pangs of conscience, or a disordered brain? The shadows changed and shifted over the still face, a gust flared the light another way, the hair rose and fell in different lines. Again he bent over her, but recoiled with the same cry of terror. He had seen something out of his past life that frightened him. It must be the ghost of a diseased fancy—an ugly nightmare—such as sometimes torture the sleep of reputable, rich people, whose lives are smooth and void of offense. He almost laughed aloud at his own weakness. Margaret and the child

had long been dead. But he was sure the child had died, and had she lived she would have been the age of this poor castaway. A horrible dread, like an icy hand, got hold of the man's heart-strings. He staggered up to his feet, pale, miserable, tremulous, gazing into the eyes of retribution, which had come and left a stain of blood at his door.

It seemed hours, but it was only minutes, before the policeman was back with assistance.

"Put the body on the stretcher," said a large man in authority. He stood with the collar of his coat turned up, and his hands deep buried in his pockets. He was a sergeant of police, the same one who followed Bill Dick and his companion down to the alley. "I know who she is," he added in the same tone. "I've a right to know. She's given me trouble enough, and it's ended just as I thought it would."

"Bear away now to —— Alley, to Bill Dick's, that's all the home she ever had. She wont last long, then the case goes to the coroner."

"You made a lucky escape, sir," turning to Mr. Morton. "Our men have picked up burglar's irons and a pistol. Every thing pints to an attack on your house, which this accident

upset. We may call it a happy accident for you, and as for the girl, I'm afraid she was past saving!"

"A happy accident," repeated the banker with a shudder. "Is there any thing money can do in this sad case?"

"Why, sir, there aint many cases so sad but what money can help a little."

Mr. Morton drew out his purse. "Take this, and if more is needed call on me."

"That's acting like a Christian, as knows how to return good for evil. It's the character I've always heard given you, sir. Depend on me to put the money where it 'ill do most good."

The men with the stretcher moved away just as the pallid winter dawn began to pale the gas lamps, and the banker was there alone gazing at something which had been left upon the pavement at his door-step.

Tap! tap! as light as the pecking of a bird's bill.

"Come in, Elise."

"Vat, mademoiselle already up?"

"Yes, Elise, you know people never oversleep on their wedding day. Besides, the tragedy

that occurred here last night, at our own door, was very shocking. I should be sad, and a little superstitious, if the sun did not shine so brightly this morning, lighting the world like a chandelier full of crystal drops. You know I think a great deal of the old adage that says, 'Blessed is the bride that the sun shines on.' But, Elise, did you hear the howling of the wind last night, and that poor creature's fearful shriek!"

"*Mon dieu !* Mademoiselle, it was terrible."

"O, my heart aches," cried Constance, "to think of that misguided girl. Hannah has just been in to say it is thought she was shot by a band of burglars who had designs on this house."

"*En vérité*, Mademoiselle, *une méchante*—"

"We must not judge, Elise, unless we know her life. She has doubtless been the child of want and misery. Perhaps there was no one to teach her the love of a dear Redeemer, or to pray 'keep us from temptation.' We do not know whose skirts are stained with her blood, or who shall answer for her sins at the judgment-bar. Perhaps she was born in a haunt of vice, and taught evil in her babyhood. Perhaps she

learned to sin because there was no protector, no father, no friend to keep her feet in innocence ; with such influences about us you and I might have become what she was. It is a comfort to think that God sees not as we see. He looks at the whole while we snatch up a little shred of some poor creature's history and are in haste to condemn. I have two or three times recalled the picture of a wild looking, bareheaded girl I noticed last night as I stood with Ralph in the window. Such hungry eyes I never saw. But it struck me then if she were clean and well-dressed she would be handsome. Something my style, Elise." This was spoken with childish frankness, devoid of vanity.

"Now, I cannot help blaming myself," Constance went on, "because I was obstinate and would have the window shutters left open, and the curtains put back to let the light stream out joyously, that passers-by even might share my happiness, if only for a moment. It was a foolish fancy, perhaps ; but I longed to have the light fall on young and old, rich and poor, happy and miserable alike. It seemed to me its touch would carry some power to bless all that came

under our windows, as in my great love I would do good to the whole world. Who knows but that poor outcast girl, seeing our pleasure and luxurious life, may have been tempted to think of an evil deed."

"Mademoiselle, ees, vat shall I say, une lettle nervous."

"No, Elise, the poor creature cannot live, they say; but I was only thinking that if she had been spared I would have taken her by the hand and helped her to a better way of life. I would have found a home for her with kind people, where she might in time have unlearned all the bad lessons of her past, and discovered that there are such things as divine compassion and human pity. It would have required patience, because the curse of poverty and neglect is branded so deep in the soul only a great love can wear it out. I seem to take a strange interest in this outcast girl. No doubt she believed the world had wronged her, and see how every thing has been lavished upon me, while even the pity of good angels she may have thought was denied to her."

"Mademoiselle's eye look rogue. Monsieur Ralph vil pe miserable."

“There now, Elise, I will be obedient and put myself into your skillful hands. Do my hair the way Ralph likes best, and I will chatter to you about my wedding, because you are my kind, devoted friend rather than my maid, and take an interest in all my silly little fancies. The prettiest I ever had was to be married to-day, and begin my new life with the New Year—married in the conservatory with white roses, and those great calm looking callas for brides-maids. If I had only been blessed with a sister, she should stand beside me to-day ; and I am going to keep the place for the one I have always longed for, the sister of my soul, who was never born into this world, but perhaps will meet me in heaven.

“What a beautiful picture we shall make, Elise, among the wreaths and garlands, with my father giving me away. I used to think I should never admire and revere another man as I do him, and the feeling is still quite unchanged. I cannot even wrong my husband when I say my father stands as my ideal of a grand gentleman, a man of stainless honor and perfect integrity.”

The light of the New Year had found many

dusky corners, and penetrated many dark and devious ways before it reached the alley where Bill Dick lived. The fact that it did at last flood that place with an unusual glow showed the winter morning was brilliant with sunshine. The wind still blew sharp, and tinkled the little ice pendants upon the trees of the parks, and seemed freighted with the lusty young voices of children, and the greetings that called down happiness upon parents and friends, brothers and sisters, in dear, old, familiar words that have made home-music for centuries.

The wounded girl was lying in one of the bunks which had been furnished for her comfort, but she heeded nothing, and the gray shade of death had crept to her pale lips. Near her head sat little Davy, tearless, but with a sharp, lonely look of misery in his face. The cat had crept near one of the girl's motionless hands, where, if it ever lifted itself again, it might fondle the dumb creature's head. Bill Dick and his wife were both quite sober now, and awed by a solemn presence, which caused them to move about on tip-toe and communicate with each other in pantomime. Suddenly Bird opened her eyes. The cunning and misery

had gone out of them, and a strange light shone in their depths.

"What's—what's the day?" she gasped.

Bill put his stubbly face close to her ear, "Day? Why it's New Year's day, Bird!"

"New Year's day," she repeated three times faintly, and then her mind began to wander, and the broken words came at long intervals.

"Didn't they say she was going to be married to-day? I'm glad I blessed the bride; there she is, in her white dress, just as I am—but I'm dead and she's married. I must bless the little children that's to come, sprinkle smiles on their cheeks. Music? Let the music play. Tell her when I'm gone I kep' the curse away from her, but don't let her come to this place; don't let her babies starve and freeze to death when the night is cold."

She slipped away again into unconsciousness with the gray shade creeping over her face. Bill had shed two or three drops of brine, which made his ferret eyes quite fiery.

"Couldn't help it," whispered he, dodging away toward his wife, "I'm naturally so tender-hearted, and it's allus been agin' me."

When she woke again Davy's look of silent

suffering met her filmy gaze, and she vaguely reached forth to feel for his little scarred hand.

"Kiss me; forgive old Whimsey," her lips fumbled at the words. "I'm going on the river down the stream to the Island. I'll see the old friends. Good-bye," with a marvelous smile flickering over her face.

Davy, with a cry, threw himself on her neck, but the Jail-bird had broken cage and escaped into a new life.

While the girl lay dying Constance Morton was married, and her clinging arms are loosened from about her father's neck, as she, too, goes away tearfully, tenderly, into a new life with the husband of her choice. The cellar where Bill Dick lived wore an unusual air of quiet, decent order. Death can dignify even a human kennel. Bill's wife had been tacking the plaits of her gown in their place, and drawing up some ancient rents. Bill, in a clean shirt, the wristbands guiltless of buttons, and the collar a kind of sepulcher in which his rough, black head was buried, sat musing, with his chin dropped in his hand and the fire gone out in his old stump of a pipe. Davy, with Shad in his arms, was keeping a tearless vigil by an object

to which all this unwonted decorum might be referred. It lay stretched upon two planks, and covered with a coarse cloth. The light of the brief winter day had almost vanished, when a tall man in plain black clothes found his way down the stairs. "It's natural," he said, after a slight greeting to Bill, "that I should take some interest in this poor unfortunate girl. It was before my door that she was shot. I do not come from idle curiosity ; can you tell me any thing concerning her parentage?"

Bill shook his head. "The only one that knowed any thing about it, sir, was a woman that got burnt up in a tenement house, when, as nigh as I can make out, the Bird was goin' on three. After that she was tossed up and down, mostly down. I let her sleep here when she didn't git stiddy government board. The way it happened, my little Dave, yender, took a shine to her cat. There she is, sir ; no great beauty, but a faithful creeter. Afterward, she and the boy grew to be like twins, and I couldn't bear to part 'em, for I'm naturally tender-hearted, and it's allus been agin' me."

"If you have indeed been kind to her it sha'n't go against you," said the stranger. "But

isn't there some keepsake, however small—a ring, a letter, a shred of dress," he asked nervously.

Bill again shook his head.

"Don't you mind the book, Bill?" asked his wife, where she stood with arms akimbo, listening to the conversation. "She couldn't read, but she used to carry it in her bosom for a charm agin' bad dreams." The woman while speaking went to a corner-cupboard, and brought a small old volume wrapped in paper.

James Morton took it with shaking hand, while a mist clouded his sight. He had recognized it at once, though dingy and tattered, as a volume of poems he had given Margaret Raynor. There, in one corner of the fly-leaf, to be made out by no other eye, were the dim letters of her name. The date was more than twenty years back.

"I will keep this," said he, steadying himself by an effort; "you shall be paid its value ten times over. I have a friend who lost a child years ago under most painful circumstances. He is always hoping to come upon some trace of her. This may, possibly, furnish a clew. Now, may I, with your permission, look at the—"

He did not finish the request ; but Bill shambled forward, and removed the cloth that covered the still figure. The Jail-bird's soiled rags had been changed for a clean white garment that showed the lines of her form. The long fair hair, that might have been a glory to her young head, was brushed, free from all its tangles. It rippled down against the marble cheek almost to the pale finger tips. The faded, hollow, weary look of wasted youth was almost gone. Something sinless and fair had come in its place. The writing of what she might have been had almost erased the record of what she was.

The stranger stood by the hapless young head a father's hand had never stroked, thinking how he had let the storms beat upon it, and a tide of remorse swept through him and bowed him down, and made him old in an hour. Lost and found too late—denied all natural rights of shelter, love, protection, friends, this child had cried alone and hungry in the night, while he slept on a bed of down. What pathos clung to the still feet that would never more stray into webs of wickedness, or stumble over the pit of temptation, and about the hands that were past

learning in this world the sweet and gentle uses of pure womanhood—could never answer to a father's caress, or thrill to a lover's touch, or fondle the cheek of a rosy infant. She had fled out of the world that denied her every thing but the knowledge of sin. The cold chrism of death was on her forehead, and the proud man there beside her clay touched it, praying humbly for forgiveness. In dying she had blessed him who had cursed her, and this he knew at last ; for patiently, little by little, he gathered up the shreds of that strange story, and pieced them into an intelligible whole, discovered the blind instinct of sisterly love which had led her to bless Constance, and to thwart those who would have done her harm.

When James Morton went out of the place where the Jail-bird lived and died he was aged and broken ; one purpose, expiation, shone out of the darkness of his soul. He went forth to seek and save. The picture of the outcast girl was henceforth to fill his days and nights. If there is forgiveness for the unspeakable sin that casts a soul shuddering and alone out into the dark he has found it. If there are grateful tears that can wash away the stain of blood laid at a

transgressor's door, he has seen them flow ; his whitened locks and furrowed face show how the worm gnaweth and the fire of conscience burns ; but there is a light in his eyes that tells, too, of peace won from God.

For years he has conducted a private mission of unequaled beneficence, to rescue young girls from poverty and crime—to pluck them as brands from the burning for his dear Lord's sake, and for the sake of one who went away unrescued herself, save by death.

Bill Dick has moved out of the cellar in the alley to a house in the country. Both he and his wife have been encouraged in every possible way to quit drinking, and lead cleanly, honest, industrious lives. If absolute success has not been attained, much has been done, and you would scarcely recognize the woman weeding in her patch of flower garden, and the man hoeing his potatoes, as the vagabond Bill and his idle wife. Little Davy has formed a close actual acquaintance with flowers and trees, the old friends of his fancy. He is not rosy, or plump, or childish yet—the curse of a joyless childhood goes too deep for that—but he sleeps in the sweet clover-scented air—the sleep of the

innocent and protected, and nature is teaching him her pure, sweet lessons. Here is old Shad, too, grown fat, and stretched out lazily in the sun ; and here, at times, comes Constance Tenant with her baby on her breast, the mother-love mellowing the happiness that shines from her lighted windows, and will ever shine, blessing all that look up to them.

There is a time when holidays come round, and great glowing fires are kindled, and children's voices and children's feet are heard in glee. Then a name comes to some loving lips, a remembrance springs to some loving hearts, not shameful, but with contrition, and prayer, and gratitude, a name that never made household music while she lived, written on a headstone by a lonely grave, the name Margaret, and underneath,

"A NEW YEAR AND A NEW LIFE."

THE END.

28/12/24

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